



School of Social Sciences

Master in Business Administration (MBA)

Postgraduate Dissertation
**“Storytelling as a tourism marketing tool.
The example of Greece.”**

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Supervisor: Lida Kyrgidou

Patras, Greece, May 2025

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**“Storytelling as a tourism marketing tool.
The example of Greece.”**

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Patras, Greece, May 2025

Abstract

The attitude towards preparing and buying a travel is far different from getting a pair of shoes or a t-shirt. It involves more money and time, and especially more imagination. Traveling is vital to shape the tourists' stories and plays a significant role in the creation of their identities. Theoretically, touristic communication consists of an organization that formulates a message, and an audience, who interprets it, with different motivations but at least an interest. There is a main category of communication called 'storytelling', especially with the contribution of local people, which presents testimonials of real characters. This is combined with marketing strategies in the vast tourism business. A timeline of the communication and marketing practices evolution is reviewed in the study.

The literature review is combined with the analysis of a questionnaire answered by 200 tourists traveling around Greece. Through our research, we attempt to describe their perceptions of the main tourism communication strategies and specifically storytelling. From an academic perspective, the "problem" and the approach of the questionnaire is an interesting challenge to draw reliable conclusions on such a subjective and multidimensional issue that depends on traveler's mood. Could the storytelling technique have a greater influence than more conventional techniques? Could the evolution of social media in tourism communication elevate the "story" to a more central theme than the trip itself?

Confirming the existing literature and corresponding research, it was found that tourists choose their destination based on information from friends and acquaintances (71.5%) and based on information from the internet (44.5%). The research for information about the destination is centered mainly on the internet (92%) and on social media (44.5%), and less on traditional print publications (38.5%). Storytelling is considered important by 71.5% of tourists. They are mainly influenced by storytelling of friends and acquaintances at a rate of 7.42/10, by stories of travel guides at a rate of 7.39/10, and less by local people stories (6.13/10) and influencers stories (5/10).

Our study also concluded that 75.5% of tourists make their final choice based on the total cost and 23% of them based on the stories they have heard. A statistical analysis of the results revealed the correlation between the positive stories tourists receive and their intention to pay more for the destination. It was calculated that increasing the impact of travel guides stories by 1/10 in a 10-point Likert scale, the prospective tourist is willing to spend 1% more, while the corresponding impact of an influencer story increases the intention to spend by 1.75%.

The conclusions of the study lead to a better understanding of how storytelling can influence tourists traveling in Greece, while it is particularly useful for professionals working in the tourism industry who are interested in improving their communication approach.

Keywords:

Storytelling / Greece / communication / tourism / influence / consumer / emotions / travel / marketing

Η διήγηση ιστοριών ως εργαλείο μάρκετινγκ στον τουρισμό.

Το παράδειγμα της Ελλάδας

Περίληψη

Η αντίληψη μας σχετικά με την προετοιμασία και την αγορά ενός ταξιδιού είναι πολύ διαφορετική από αυτή της αγοράς ενός ζευγαριού παπουτσιών ή μιας μπλούζας καθώς το ταξίδι απαιτεί περισσότερα χρήματα και χρόνο, και κυρίως περισσότερη φαντασία. Τα ταξίδια είναι ζωτικής σημασίας για τη διαμόρφωση των εμπειριών των τουριστών και παίζουν σημαντικό ρόλο στη δημιουργία της προσωπικότητάς τους. Η θεωρία αναφέρει ότι η τουριστική επικοινωνία αποτελείται από έναν οργανισμό που διαμορφώνει ένα μήνυμα και ένα κοινό που το ερμηνεύει, με διαφορετικά κίνητρα αλλά τουλάχιστον κάποιο ενδιαφέρον. Υπάρχει μια κύρια κατηγορία επικοινωνίας που ονομάζεται αφήγηση ιστοριών (storytelling), συχνά με τη συνεισφορά ντόπιων ανθρώπων, η οποία παρουσιάζει μαρτυρίες πραγματικών χαρακτήρων. Αυτό συνδυάζεται με στρατηγικές μάρκετινγκ στον ευρύτερο τουριστικό τομέα. Μια ιστορική εξέλιξη των πρακτικών επικοινωνίας και μάρκετινγκ θα παρουσιαστεί στη βιβλιογραφική ανασκόπηση της έρευνας μας.

Η βιβλιογραφική έρευνα συνδυάζεται με την ανάλυση των δεδομένων του ερωτηματολογίου που απαντήθηκε από 200 τουρίστες που ταξιδεύουν στην Ελλάδα. Μέσω των ερωτήσεων προσπαθούμε να περιγράψουμε τις αντιλήψεις τους για τις κύριες στρατηγικές επικοινωνίας και ειδικότερα για την αφήγηση ιστοριών (storytelling). Από ακαδημαϊκή άποψη, το «πρόβλημα» και η προσέγγιση του ερωτηματολογίου είναι μια ενδιαφέρουσα πρόκληση ώστε να βγουν αξιόπιστα συμπεράσματα σε ένα τόσο υποκειμενικό και πολυδιάστατο ζήτημα που εξαρτάται από τη διάθεση του ταξιδιώτη. Μήπως η τεχνική της αφήγησης ιστοριών έχει μεγαλύτερη επιρροή από τις πιο συνήθεις τεχνικές; Μήπως η εξέλιξη των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης στην τουριστική επικοινωνία ανάγει την «ιστορία» σε πιο κεντρικό θέμα από το ίδιο το ταξίδι;

Επιβεβαιώνοντας την υπάρχουσα βιβλιογραφία και αντίστοιχες έρευνες διαπιστώθηκε ότι οι τουρίστες επιλέγουν τον προορισμό τους με βάση πληροφορίες από γνωστούς (71,5%) και με βάση πληροφορίες από το διαδίκτυο (44,5%). Η αναζήτηση δε για πληροφορίες σχετικά με τον προορισμό επικεντρώνεται στο διαδίκτυο (92%) και στα κοινωνικά δίκτυα (44,5%) και λιγότερο στις παραδοσιακότερες έντυπες εκδόσεις (38,5%). Η διήγηση ιστοριών θεωρείται σημαντική για το 71,5% των τουριστών. Οι ίδιοι επηρεάζονται κυρίως από τη διήγηση ιστοριών φίλων και γνωστών σε βαθμό 7,42/10, από τις ιστορίες των

ταξιδιωτικών οδηγών σε βαθμό 7,39/10 και λιγότερο από τις ιστορίες ντόπιων (6,13/10) και τις ιστορίες των influencers (5/10).

Συνηχθή επίσης το συμπέρασμα ότι 75,5% των τουριστών κάνουν την τελική επιλογή τους με βάση το συνολικό κόστος και 23% με βάση τις ιστορίες που έχουν ακούσει. Μια στατιστική ανάλυση των αποτελεσμάτων ανέδειξε τη συσχέτιση των θετικών ιστοριών που λαμβάνουν οι τουρίστες με την πρόθεση τους να πληρώσουν περισσότερο για τον συγκεκριμένο προορισμό. Υπολογίσθηκε ότι αυξάνοντας κατά 1/10 σε 10-βάθμια κλίμακα Likert το βαθμό επίδρασης των ιστοριών από ταξιδιωτικές ιστορίες, ο υποψήφιος τουρίστας προτίθεται να δαπανήσει 1% περισσότερο, ενώ η αντίστοιχη επίδραση μιας ιστορίας ενός influencer αυξάνει την πρόθεση για δαπάνη κατά 1,75%.

Τα συμπεράσματα της εργασίας οδηγούν σε μια καλύτερη κατανόηση του πώς η αφήγηση ιστοριών (storytelling) μπορεί να επηρεάσει τους τουρίστες που ταξιδεύουν στην Ελλάδα, ενώ αποδεικνύονται ιδιαίτερα χρήσιμα για τους επαγγελματίες που εργάζονται στην τουριστική βιομηχανία και ενδιαφέρονται να βελτιώσουν την επικοινωνιακή τους προσέγγιση.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά:

Αφήγηση ιστοριών / Ελλάδα / επικοινωνία / τουρισμός / επιρροή / καταναλωτής / συναισθήματα / ταξίδι / μάρκετινγκ

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	5
Περίληψη.....	7
Table of Contents.....	9
List of Figures.....	10
List of Tables	11
List of Abbreviations & Acronyms.....	12
1. Introduction.....	13
2. Literature Review	16
2.1 Communication and marketing in tourism business	16
2.1.1 Approaching travelers needs	18
2.1.2 Tourism business marketing channels	20
2.1.3 Influencers in tourism business	23
2.2 Storytelling and the Greek case.....	28
2.2.1 Heritage storytelling	30
2.2.2 Storytelling for sustainable tourism	31
2.2.3 Greece storytelling campaigns	33
3. Research methodology	35
3.1 Case study purpose.....	35
3.2 Research strategy and method.....	37
3.3 Survey structure	37
3.4 Data Collection and Methodology Tools	38
3.5 Survey variables	39
3.6 Pre-testing	39
3.7 Sampling	39
3.8 Questionnaire Design and Development.....	40
4. Data Analysis	45
4.1 Questionnaire findings and interpretation	45
4.2 Data statistical analysis	55
5. Discussion of findings.....	59
5.1 Comparison with relevant studies	59
5.2 Theoretical and Managerial Implications.....	61
5.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions.....	63
6. Conclusions	65
References	67

List of Figures

Figure 1 Maslow pyramid of needs (source: Maslow, 1943)	19
Figure 2 Eurobarometer survey - Major tourism information sources (source: Flash Eurobarometer 2015)	21
Figure 3 Tourism Economics survey - Tourism research via internet (source: Tourism Economics 2013)	22
Figure 4 Information-processing model of persuasion and behavioral change (source: McGuire, 2019)	25
Figure 5 Nicosia Model of Consumer Decision Process (source: Nicosia, 1966).....	26
Figure 6 Bettman Information Processing Model of Consumer Choice (source: Bettman, 1979).....	27
Figure 7 Question 1 results.....	45
Figure 8 Question 2 results.....	46
Figure 9 Question 3 results.....	46
Figure 10 Question 4 results.....	47
Figure 11 Question 5 results.....	47
Figure 12 Question 6 results.....	48
Figure 13 Question 7 results.....	49
Figure 14 Question 8 results.....	50
Figure 15 Question 9 results.....	50
Figure 16 Question 10 results.....	51
Figure 17 Question 11 results.....	52
Figure 18 Question 12 results.....	52
Figure 19 Question 13 results.....	53
Figure 20 Question 14 results.....	53
Figure 21 Question 15 results.....	54
Figure 22 Question 16 results.....	55

List of Tables

Table 1 Survey demographic characteristics	46
Table 2 Reliability analysis - Cronbach's alpha with omitted items.....	56
Table 3 Regression analysis with 4 independent variables	57
Table 4 Regression analysis with 2 independent variables	58

List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
DMOs	Destination Marketing Organizations
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product.
GNTO	Greek National Tourism Organization
SDL	Service-Dominant Logic
SETE	Greek Tourism Businesses Association
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

1. Introduction

Traveling is vital to shape the tourists’ stories and plays a significant role in the creation of their identities. Theoretically, touristic communication consists of an organization that formulates a message, and an audience, who interprets it, with different motivations but at least an interest. There is a main category of communication called ‘storytelling’, especially with the contribution of local people, which presents testimonials of real characters. This is combined with marketing strategies in the vast tourism business. A timeline of the communication and marketing practices evolution is reviewed in the bibliography.

Additionally, through questionnaires given to a panel of tourists, we will try to describe their perceptions of the main communication strategies and especially storytelling. We will focus on the narrative (content) and figurative (expression) fields of storytelling. Does this particular technique have more influence on choices than more pragmatic techniques? Does social media evolution of touristic communication have made ‘the story’ a more central subject than the travel itself?

This literature survey is combined with the analysis of questionnaire data focused on tourists travelling around Greece. From an academic point of view the ‘problem’ and the questionnaire approach is challenging to crystallize conclusions in such a subjective, multivariable and humor depending issue. At the same time, the topic is useful for professionals working in tourism business and are interested on improving their communication perspective. The conclusions dissertation lead to a better understanding of how ‘storytelling’ can strike a chord with tourists travelling around Greece.

This dissertation includes a total of five sections, in which the following matters are described and examined. In the present chapter, the main issue examined in the research is presented and discussed, as well as the way that this dissertation is structured and naturally decline from a communication and marketing theory to a specific targeted questionnaire analyzing how and to what extent storytelling functions as a marketing tool in the Greek market.

The second section is the bibliographic review which approaches the topic from a general to a more specific point of view. More particularly, it begins with the concepts of communication and marketing in the tourism sector to demonstrate the role they play in this particular market. Next, the needs of travelers are analyzed to understand the deeper goal that must be satisfied. The intersection of communication and marketing with the needs of

travelers is the communication channels that bridge the two sides. Within these channels, and mainly via internet, we record the way in which the traveler is influenced by these stimuli.

Furthermore, we present more specific information on Greek tourism market. The peculiarities of the Greek tourism product are largely related to the rich history it carries. At the same time, we highlight other characteristics of the Greek tourism industry, such as the warm and friendly hospitality of the place. Within this context, the social impact of tourism on terms of sustainability and the preservation of the area's identity is also analyzed. Having collected all this data along this bibliographic journey, several questions naturally emerge on the questionnaire.

The questionnaire presented in the third and fourth section is the core of this survey. The methodology and the tools applied in the research are explained and justified. Particular mentions are made on the questionnaire sampling, variables and pre-testing. The objective of this study is to investigate the current state, research hotspots, and emerging trends in storytelling within the tourism field, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of existing research, identifying key areas of focus, and highlighting potential directions for future studies. The study focusses on Greek market and aims to collect the travelers perception on storytelling on their travelling choices. At the beginning of the questionnaire, several demographic data are collected regarding the age, gender, and marital status of the respondent. After collecting these demographic data, we attempt to outline the travel profile of the respondent in relation to the initial destination search they might conduct, as well as how early they choose to book their vacations. In the questions, we attempt to identify which communication tool influence the prospective traveler more. We also try to score the traveler's level of influence from the stories about the place they may have from travel guides, local people, acquaintances and friends who have traveled to that place, or social media influencers. In the last part of the questionnaire, we try through our questions to find out how the traveler evaluates and arrives at their final travel choice between cost and the positive impression created by storytelling.

The fourth section presents the principal findings of the questionnaire and tries to interpret them. These data are analyzed and the relationship several variables is examined. A multiple regression model is used to predict the travelers' willingness to pay more based on the influence from 4 storytelling sources.

In the fifth section, the findings are discussed and compare with results from relevant studies. The theoretical and practical implications are developed as well pointing out the contribution of the study. The research presents some limitations and assumptions primarily related to the representativeness of the sample of individuals who responded to the questionnaire. As the results of the questionnaire indicate, the degree and manner of influence of travelers by storytelling depend on their background, experiences, and generally on how each person integrates their vacations into their lifestyle and attitude.

The most significant conclusions of the questionnaire are presented in the last section. Based on the research and its results, it would be very interesting to expand in a future research the survey to potential travelers of different origins and stimuli and record the evolution of travelers attitude over time.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communication and marketing in tourism business

Communication in the tourism sector aims to promote a tourist destination to a potential clientele. The communication message includes stimuli directed to a recipient who can be the general public or a targeted group of individuals. The delivered message aims to raise awareness, create a desire to purchase, and ultimately lead to the purchase of the tourism product. Tourism communication is also part of marketing as the destination evolves progressively to a product which aims creating its own brand. Nowadays, many destinations have created their own brand, maximizing the impact of their communication on specific clientele (e.g., Costa Navarino, Halkidiki, Mykonos, Faliraki Rhodes, etc.). For this reason, it is interesting identifying the various types of communication, the marketing channels, and investigate the response of the tourist-consumer in the tourism industry. Tourism communication is primarily commercial communication as it aims at the "sale of a destination", whether it is for an immediate travel purchase or creating a positive image of the destination for a future trip (Beresecka, 2018). At the same time, there is the so-called institutional communication that originates from a company or a public institution and aims conveying a broader message and building a deeper and long-term relationship with the prospective traveler. Advertising communication, which is the most fundamental and direct channel, is initially oriented towards the market through the verbal way but evolves into the creation of image, meaning, and identity for the destination. The marketing strategy developed by each destination or company is based on 2 fundamental preliminary questions. The first concerns the target: who are the consumers we are addressing to? To achieve this, the market is divided into segments, and among these segments, customers are selected as targets. The second key question of the marketing strategy is: what is the added value that the company provides to these customers? This value proposition allows the brand to position itself in the market and differentiate itself. The customer must actually believe that the value of the product/service offered by the company is greater than its competitors. Through this notion of perceived value, we identify the definition of marketing given by Lendrvie and Levy: "the effort of organizations to adapt to competitive markets, to influence the behavior of their audience to their advantage, through an offering whose perceived value is sustainably superior to that of competitors" (Lendrvie & Levy, 2012). This definition includes the three fundamental elements of an organization's marketing dimension, the product, the market (the audience), and the competition. Marketing theory generally distinguishes advertising, which is considered the purchase of space in the media (the five

Postgraduate Dissertation

traditional media being cinema, radio, print, television, and billboards, as well as new media such as the Internet), from direct marketing actions that are more personalized (such as direct mail) and point-of-sale promotion, which aims to immediate feedback from the recipient through the act of purchase (Nash, 2000). Over the last decades, Internet has bridged the gap between advertising communication and institutional communication, as different types of messages can coexist on the same website. Advertising communication can lead to the act of direct purchase. Thus, advertising communication is becoming increasingly "commercial" in the sense that it clearly aims at acquiring a good or service from the visitor on the website. Ultimately, throughout all this communication and marketing channels, we can still discern the difference between the journey and the travel story. On one hand, for the non-traveler, stories are a window to the world, to different customs and traditions. This story allows them to forge their imagination and their own identity, through contrast and recognition by others, without need to cross boundaries. On the other hand, the traveler who has traveled or is preparing to do so and discover with their own eyes, the story offered by the destination and its inhabitants allows them to resonate with what they perceive or have perceived from their own perspective. The traveler can then remember, recognize themselves or not in what is being said (relate their adventures or recognize their values) and rely on this narrative to create their own story.

2.1.1 Approaching travelers needs

The tourist is a traveler, a person who travels for pleasure. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines this activity of tourism as "the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes." (World Tourism Organization, 2019). The tourism sector encompasses various activities, such as transportation, accommodation, relaxation, recreation, cultural activities, etc. The tourist is therefore a consumer of services in general, which form the "tourism industry," and it is worth exploring the cognitive, emotional, relational, and motor connections that develop. In this chapter, we explore the relationships between tourism communication and influence, first of all by observing the different levels of impact of a message. The message can act on a cognitive level, meaning that it will be addressed to the reasoning of the potential tourist who is actively or passively seeking information. It is therefore a matter of attracting attention and conveying information. The message can also affect an emotional level, creating the tourist's interest and consequently altering their psychological state. Finally, the third type of message impact is synthetic, calling for action, in the act of purchasing (modifying behavior this time and no longer just the psychological state). At the center of this cognitive-emotional-synthetic process are the motivation and involvement of the recipient, the tourist, for the message they perceive. Several theories attempt to decode the concept of motivation. Thus, according to the psychoanalytic position, motivation is the result of instinctual drives that arise from an imbalance between the id, the ego, and the superego, while psychosocial theory places society more at the center of the motivation process, assuming that it is the interaction between the individual and their social environment that creates motivation. Therefore, motivation could arise from two forces (Dann, 1977): those internal to the tourist that drive them to travel (personal needs, tourism knowledge, socioeconomic factors, etc.), and those external to the tourist that attract them towards a travel experience (storytelling, commercial image, climate, sun, etc.). Need, whether it is individual or created by compliance with society, can be defined according to Maslow as the center of motivation. Maslow distinguishes five types of needs that are hierarchically classified, the next one can only be felt when the immediately preceding one is satisfied, and so on (Maslow, 1943).

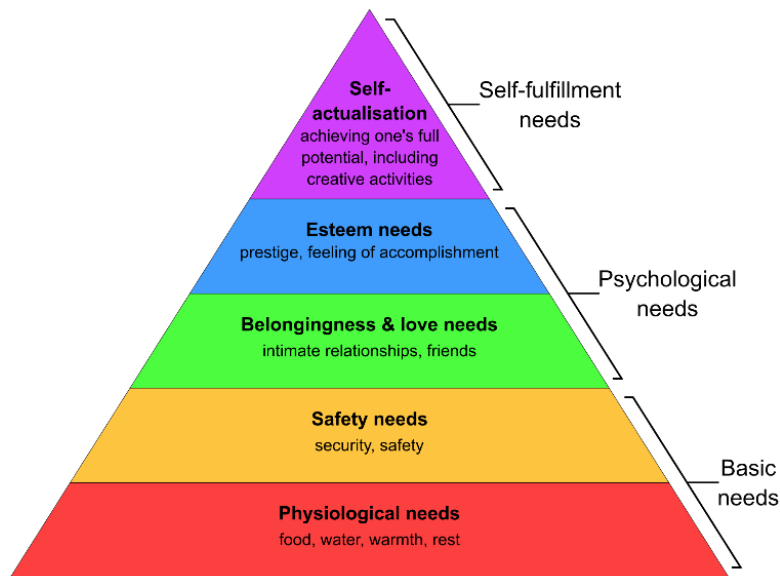


Figure 1 Maslow pyramid of needs (source: Maslow, 1943)

The concept of "need" is used in marketing for three purposes: to convey a message and better position a product or brand, to develop a market by identifying unmet needs of potential customers, and finally, to reveal market barriers that hinder the individual from acquiring the good or service. Thus, marketing can activate the recognition of a need, particularly by modifying the way individuals perceive themselves (for instance a water skiing activity that will make them feel younger), creating new products that generate previously unknown needs (for instance a hot air balloon flight over a destination), or reminding them of the existence of general needs that have been set aside (for instance an eco-friendly stay on a farm in the nature). Next, we attempt to delve into the impact of tourism communication and marketing on the recipient in a cognitive, emotional, and conative distinction, as the message aims at action, that is, modifying the attitude and behavior of the potential tourist towards the destination (conative) by engaging with emotions and reasoning.

2.1.2 Tourism business marketing channels

Communication channels in the tourism industry, as well as more generally, are categorized into those related to personal communication and those related to non-personal communication (Kotler 2015). Personal communication channels can be classified into advisory media, expert opinions, and social environment. Advisory media are usually tourism exhibitions where sellers have the opportunity to interact with potential tourists and guide them by presenting brochures and tourism materials of the destination. Expert channels are local tourism experts who present and give inside information for the destination. Finally, social channels, such as friends, colleagues, and anyone’s networks, is the most frequent and all-day channel which interact, discuss and influence travelers.

In the meanwhile, non-personal communication channels do not offer direct person-to-person contact but always include a relevant message. Typical channels of non-personal communication are the press, the television, posters in public places and the last but not least channel, internet. In all channels presented above the core is the message. This message often includes stories. The sensibility of travelers on storytelling in each type of personal and non-personal communication will be examined in our questionnaire.

The larger part of our study is focused on storytelling and communication via internet, which is the contemporary channel that has changed over the last decades the habits of both prospective tourists, tourism professionals and public institutions in the sector. What is even more impressive and worthy of further and continuous investigation is the fact that the internet continues to dynamically change market habits and trends. The importance of searching for travel information online was highlighted by the Eurobarometer survey (Flash Eurobarometer 2015), which revealed that half of prospective travelers seek information sources through internet and social media. Recommendations from friends and personal experience also seem playing a significant role in the research for information, at rates of 55% and 35% respectively, in contrast to other non-personal communication channels (press, television, leaflets) which gather less interest.

Πιο σημαντικές πηγές ταξιδιωτικών πληροφοριών

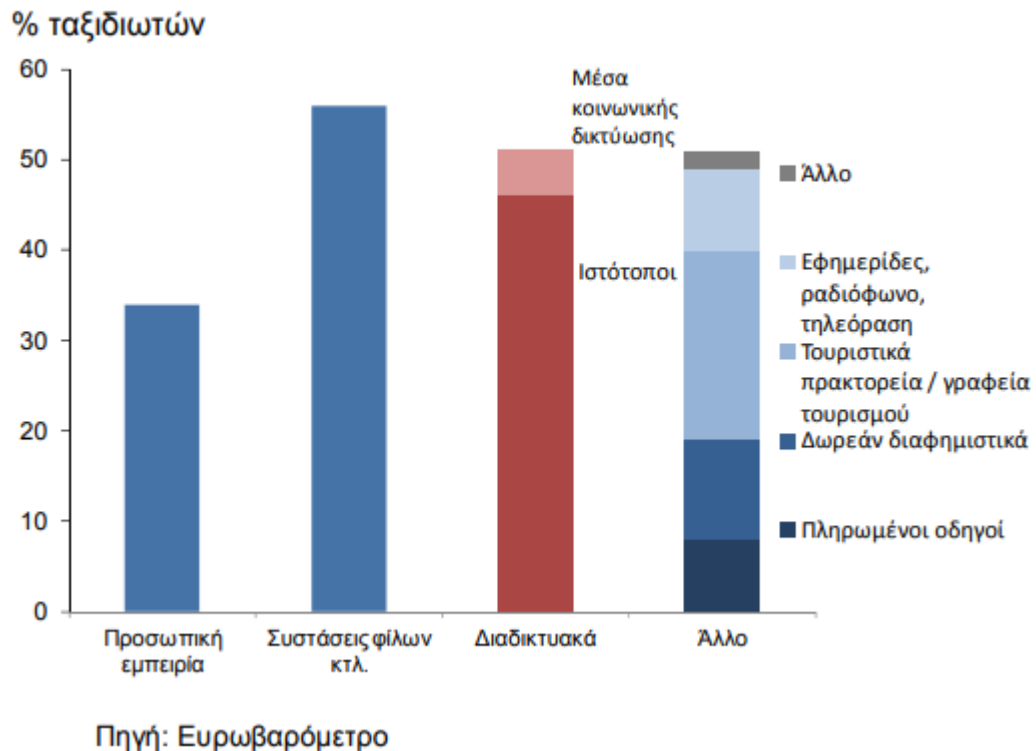


Figure 2 Eurobarometer survey - Major tourism information sources (source: Flash Eurobarometer 2015)

Internet plays a vital and growing role in tourism market. Internet is nowadays the main source of travel information, surpassing all other forms of traditional media and marketing that we previously presented. Travel businesses seek and invest in interacting with consumers through online marketing, social media, travel apps, search functions, and booking platforms. These various sources of information and sales networks are increasingly directing the tourism sector. According to a series of studies conducted on greek tourism market, which represents one of the largest portions of the country's GDP, 10% of all foreign tourist arrivals in Greece searched online for their destination and 5% made a direct booking online (Tourism Economics, 2013). The corresponding rates for EU countries are 49% for destination research and 24% for direct online booking.

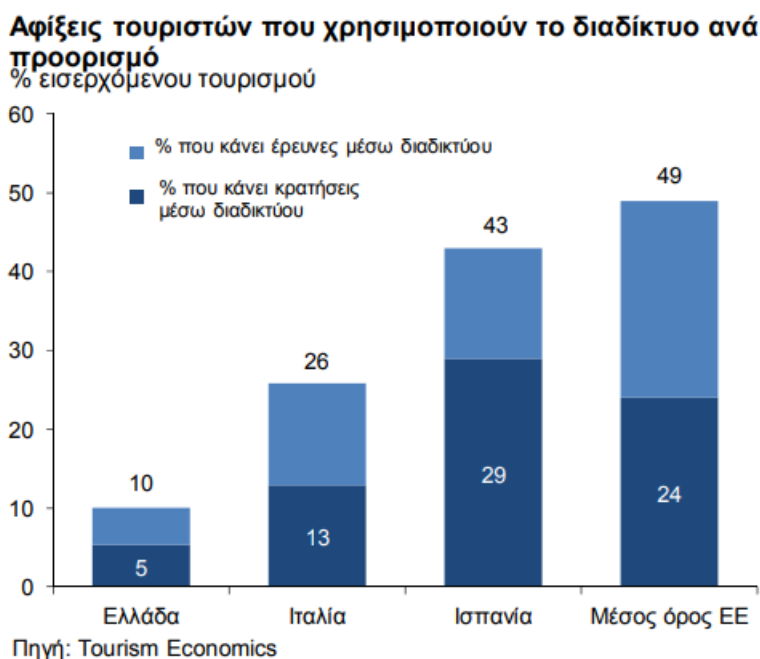


Figure 3 Tourism Economics survey - Tourism research via internet (source: Tourism Economics 2013)

Internet is thus established as the principal channel of information and data research. The business of e-tourism is rapidly evolving into m-tourism through mobile devices, and digital tools (smartphones, tablets, AI, etc.) are present in all aspects of the tourism experience. From the tourists' side, from the beginning, they assist the travelers trip preparation, searching for information about the destination(s), booking tickets and accommodations, and activities. During the experience, these tools also allow real-time updates, organization, and making the most (and perhaps the best) of the stay at the destination. Finally, upon returning, they particularly contribute to the evaluation of destinations, accommodations, and activities (Tripadvisor, Google reviews and other similar platforms for instance), as well as facilitate the exchange with other internet users such as vacation statuses and photos on social media or forums (TripAdvisor 2008). In general, as Philippe Viallon (Viallon, 2014) points out during the international tourism communication conference in France in 2014, the Internet has brought about a change in mindsets: the immediate satisfaction of needs (buying a trip immediately and leaving the same day, for example, as suggested by last-minute booking websites), hyper-connectivity with information coming to travelers everywhere and at all times to facilitate mobility, the "utopia of free information," and finally, the prescription and guidance by everyone (old tourists).

Social media are important on shaping the marketplace and the global economy. Their importance is widely recognized by marketers who try to better understand the consumer behavior by evaluating information and feedback for their own products, as well as the competitors (Duan, Yu, Cao & Levy, 2015). This is also the case in the tourism sector, as

people interact with others on social media platforms while looking for information that helps them plan their trips (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). The tourism and hospitality industry has been greatly influenced by social media, as they appear to play a big role in the service industry. This is also attributed to the intangibility of the services provided in tourism, as they cannot be easily evaluated prior to consumption (Lewis and Chambers, 2000). A growing number of opinion websites such as Tripadvisor and Google reviews have emerged and gained popularity over the last decades. Information exchange and user generated content in the form of comments, reviews, photos of travelers etc. on social media is seen as more independent, thus making it more influential (Litvin et al., 2008) and more impartial and reliable (Wilson, Murphy & Cambra, 2012). In this context of modern tourism reality, we are seeking through our questionnaire the impact of storytelling on an immediate satisfaction mindset and the utopia of free information.

2.1.3 Influencers in tourism business

It is extremely important in our analysis to investigate how the message received by the prospective traveler is decoded by them and how it affects them. The story of a destination is, in a sense, a representation of the destination that the audience associates with the area. The impact of this representation and imagination on the recipient is critical as it can generate the desire to visit that destination.

The history of the promoted tourist destination is essential in tourism even more than in other areas of activity. This is due to various factors: the fact that tourism is a service, therefore, essentially intangible and non-testable the sensitivity to various risks (economic, political, climate crises, etc.), and the characteristics of customer motivations that may seem irrational. Additionally, tourism is not a primary need, it has budget and time constraints, and is therefore extremely influenced by the desires of the consumers themselves. Finally, the major current trends in global tourism tend to enhance the importance of storytelling in attracting tourists. On the one hand, tourism is highly sensitive to circumstances and crises, whether they are economic (currency fluctuations, changes in gross domestic product, rising energy costs, for example), geopolitical (wars, terrorism, armed conflicts for instance), or climatic (earthquakes, tsunamis, for example). A destination experiencing such a crisis can almost immediately suffer a degradation of its image and will need a new revitalizing communication to attract tourists again. On the other hand, although still concentrated in space and time, the number of tourists is increasing (mainly from emerging countries), as is the number of tourist destinations and therefore the

competition.

The story and its narration hold even greater significance in the tourism market as tourism is inherently connected to the lifestyle and behaviors of travelers and can be considered a reflection of their personality. Tourism is therefore one way among others to express one's thoughts, lifestyle, and character. This explains the direct interaction of the individual with the story as it touches upon different aspects and different ways of thinking (eco-tourism, for example).

Information processing, whether it is a general message of tourism communication or storytelling, encourages the tourist to perceive, analyze, and integrate information into their knowledge. According to Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (Blackwell, 2005) the information processing stage is the process by which the tourist transforms the information received through various stimuli from the external world into internal knowledge of their mental world. This processing can be either experiential (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) or analytical (Bettman, 1979, Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). In the first case, the focus is on pleasure and emotional reactions to stimuli, while in the second case, cognitive and analytical reactions to stimuli are at the center of the concept.

The stages of information processing are detailed in the diagram below (McGuire, 2019). It starts with exposure to the stimulus or stimuli (communication about the destination, in our case). Next, the potential tourist will either pay attention to this message or not. Indeed, the exposure can be passive in the case, for example, a poster advertisement for a destination. Then comes the cognitive process, "that is, related to knowledge, which is based on both the sensory organs and the central nervous system that will filter and interpret the information coming from the environment" (Filser, 1996). Faced with the variety of information to which the consumer is subjected, a filter is necessary to be applied. It is therefore a necessarily subjective and non-exhaustive selection that operates with successive additions. Following attention comes understanding, a sort of decoding. It is about the potential tourist categorizing the information they received, then developing connections between the incoming stimulus and their previous experiences, and finally organizing the data, the combination of which constitutes the totality of the received information. The recipient of the message will accept it or not, meaning they will consider the validity of the message (especially the source) as well as the sensations and emotions that were triggered. Finally, the tourist will retain the information in his memory, combined with previous experiences or entirely new ones. The stages of exposure to the stimulus, attention, understanding, and acceptance or rejection belong to the field of "perception."

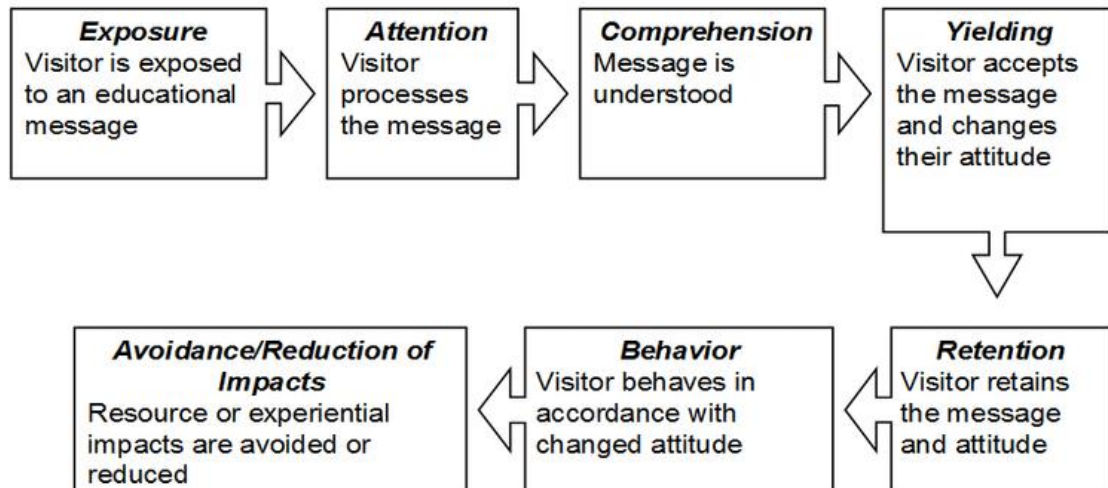


Figure 4 Information-processing model of persuasion and behavioral change (source: McGuire, 2019)

A more targeted theoretical approach to message processing comes from the Nicosia model (Nicosia, 1966). Nicosia model is based on advertising information to observe the formation of individuals' preferences, their attitudes, and their purchasing behaviors. The characteristics of the product and the characteristics of the consumer (age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) are taken into account during the reception and processing of the information. This dual stage leads to the formation of an attitude towards the product or service (preference or not compared to products of the same category, for example) which, combined with the evaluation of needs in relation to this product, will encourage or discourage the purchase.

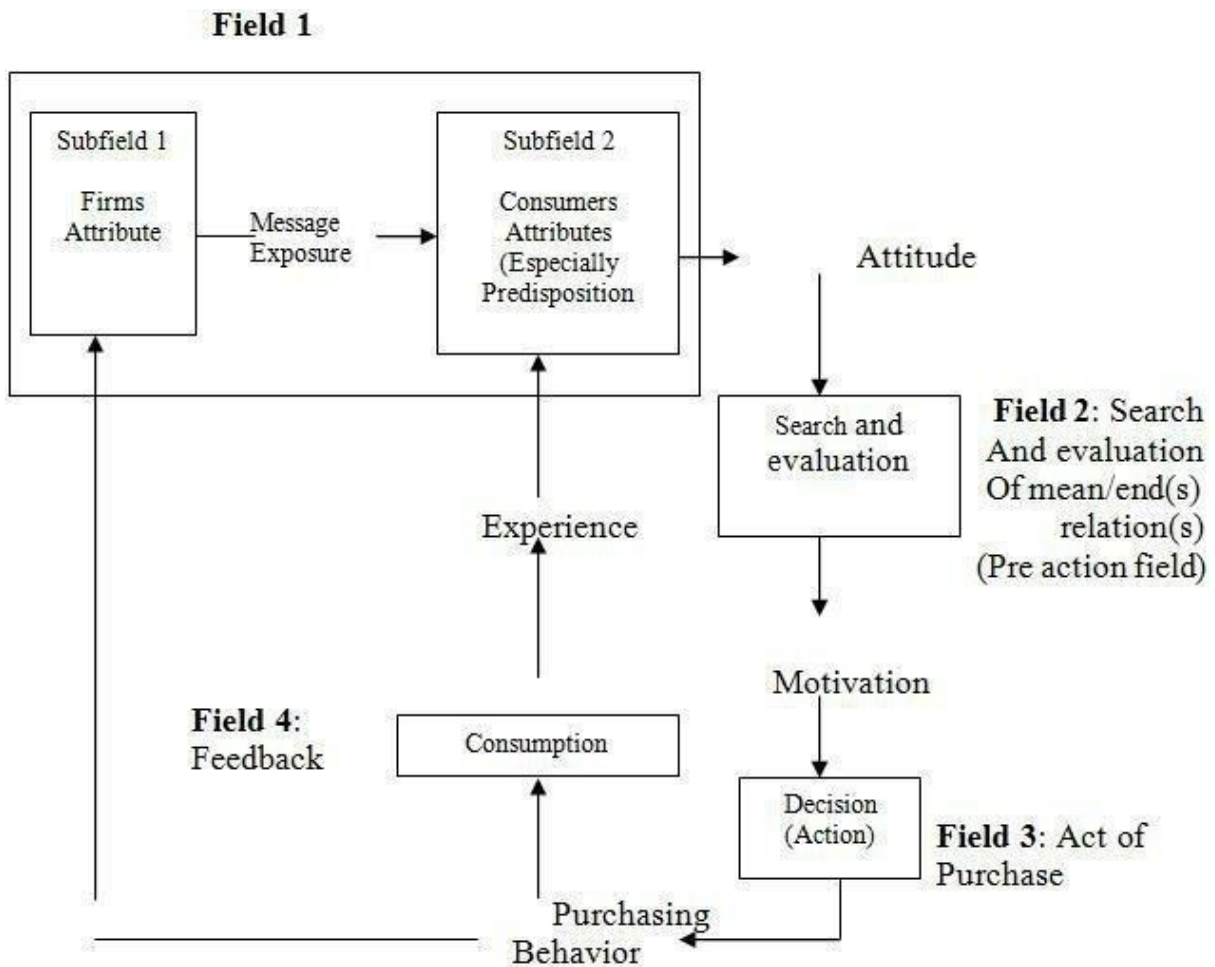
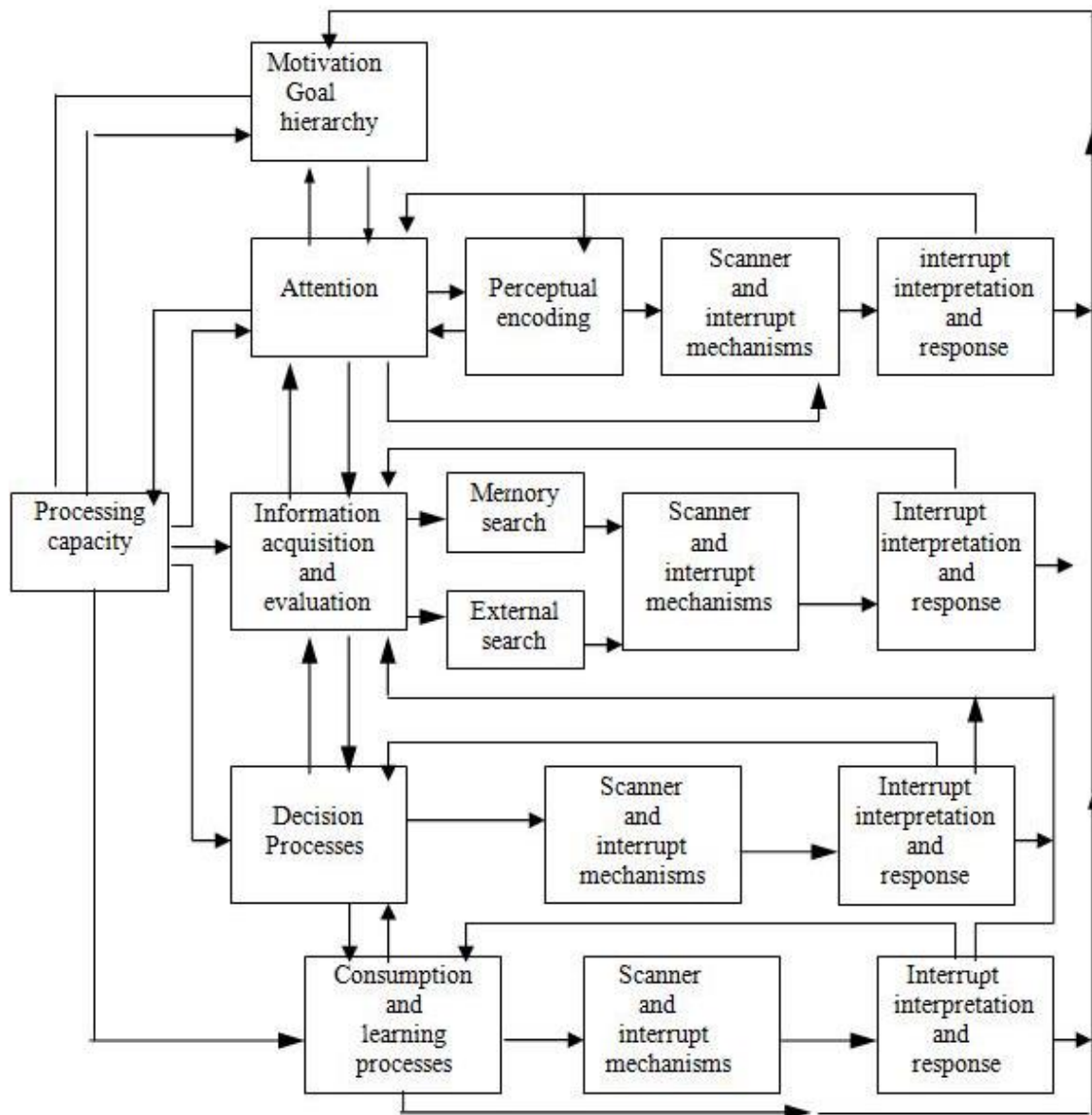


Figure 5 Nicosia Model of Consumer Decision Process (source: Nicosia, 1966)

Finally, the last information processing model that we find useful to study is the Bettman Information Processing model (Bettman, 1979). It clearly establishes the concept of movement before the attention phase. Additionally, it introduces the concepts of scanning and interruption that describe how the consumer-tourist perceives their environment: they continuously scan it, which allows them to capture the plethora of information surrounding them. However, if a piece of information particularly captures his attention (especially if it aligns with his motivations), then he interrupts this scanning to give it more attention.



The stage of information processing is central to the assimilation of the story being told, as we assume that it is at this moment that the tourist compares the new information they receive with the elements they already possess (previous experiences, representations of the destination that contribute to the formation of an imagination about this place, etc.). The theoretical approach of information analysis combined with the practical approach of storytelling forms the framework of questions that will be posed in the questionnaire of this study. The stimulus that comes from storytelling may or may not be the direct source of attitude formation. The motivation may precede or follow the attention to the story. In any case, the stimulus is the first phase, and attention depends on the tourist's prior interests and needs. Communication can therefore be accepted or rejected. We are interested in observing the effect on the tourist of various communication techniques that use different stimuli.

2.2 Storytelling and the Greek case

Storytelling is the art of telling stories, anecdotes in a way that conveys one or more messages, gives a narrative dimension to communication, modifies the behavior of the audience or listener, and influences them. It is a form of communication which is the subject of research in several fields. Narrative communication, as a tool for communication and group management, experienced a revival in the 1990s. Christian Salmon anatomizes the timeless human desire for narrative form and how it is abused in the marketing mechanisms in his book (Salmon, 2010). Narrative is gradually being imposed in various sciences from linguistics to political science, management and marketing. Even if, it is a technique for transmitting values as old as the world itself, we could say, like the myths it sometimes relies on. Today's means of communication, especially the Internet, allow her to promote and spread her stories more quickly and in a way that reaches a broader audience. In the context of tourism communication, which is the subject of our work, storytelling is valued as an attempt to influence tourist behavior, encouraging them to visit the highlighted destination. Whether it is the narration of tourists who returned from their vacations excited about their stays, the storytelling of the country's history, or the untold story of a local resident, it seems to be recognized today as an effective influencing technique beyond standardized tools (destination description, activity list, for example). In the notion of "storytelling", the story and its telling are inherently intertwined. Thus, narrative communication is based on the facts and the way they are told. "Narrative gives us access to emotions that will arise as a result of your decision". Thus, the story, broadly understood for the time being, is distinguished from the example due to the emotional content it conveys. Moreover, "not all narratives are good stories for knowledge sharing" (Sole and Wilson, 2002). Not all stories convey an informative message; some aim solely to entertain, for example. It is therefore advisable to draw a line between what is narrative and what is not. A necessarily blurry boundary, since stories, narratives, myths, and fairy tales all rely on a narrative structure.

Moreover, the second aspect of storytelling, the "telling" itself, also deserves our attention. Indeed, as Julie Jones O'Leary states, "the power of storytelling comes from the speaker's ability to tell the story." Researchers have found that it is in the interaction between the storyteller and the listener where the meaning of the story occurs, the understanding (O'Leary, 2012). We can thus think that the way the story is told matters as much as its content. This is naturally true in oral speech, in the case of a speech, a lecture, or a training, but it can also be examined at the level of written history. Those who are considered great

"storytellers" are individuals capable of conveying through their narration the message and values they wanted to pass on, connect their words with emotions, images, and sensations that evoke or regenerate in their audience (or their readers) ("they connect with their audience by stirring up images, sounds, and smells") (O'Leary, 2012).

When the resident is the narrator and the subject of the story they tell to the potential tourist, we can consider them the sender of the message, thus playing the same role as the destination promotion organization, as they promote their country as a tourist destination. Moreover, it can also be considered part of the product, as it constitutes one of the advantages of the destination. Indeed, the honorable reception, authenticity, and hospitality of the residents are, today more than ever, perceived as advantages for a destination. The sender's message can then focus, for example, on the proximity to the potential tourist (geographical, economic, lifestyle, etc.). It can convey a way of life projected by the destination: friendliness, the tranquility of life, naturalness, sports, relaxation, dolce vita... The message will be able to communicate especially a signature and thus, the reference to a specific group. The message "product" could indicate this, a complication or proximity between the resident, who is considered an added value of the destination, and the tourist. Finally, we can also imagine a message of coexistence between the resident and the tourist. The narrative from the resident in tourist communication, why?

The technique of storytelling is valued, as we have seen, in various fields of activity. Steve Jobs in 1994 is quoted as saying: "The most powerful person is the storyteller. The storyteller sets the vision, values and agenda of an entire generation that is to come". However, in the specific field of tourism communication, it seems that it is a particularly suitable tool for three main reasons. The first lies in the fact that tourism is an area of activity disconnected from everyday life that plays with dreams, stories, and fairy tales. Moreover, it is a service that cannot be tested in advance. Thus, word-of-mouth communication from tourists who have previously visited the destination, as well as the opinions of locals, whom we can characterize as destination experts, are important for the choice. Finally, the tourist experience fully involves the tourist. It is not a consumption routine, insignificant to the budget or one that the consumer can experience from a distance. During the tourist stay, the consumer personally experiences the trip developing sensations and emotions, participates financially and temporally (before, during research and booking, during the trip, and after, with the memories), and does not frequently renew the experience. Let's think about all those destinations we visit only once in a lifetime, which are a significant investment and will leave indelible memories.

Marketing professionals, and particularly advertising professionals, use storytelling as a powerful tool to connect with and influence their customers and potential customers. Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) have also adopted storytelling to promote their offerings. Storytelling not only helps connect destination brands with tourists but also plays a crucial role in transforming experiences and fostering support (Chronis, 2005, McCabe & Foster, 2006). Stories that connect destinations in the minds of potential tourists can be extremely influential and shape the actual journey. Destination stories are disseminated in various ways as different actors (e.g., businesses, advertisers, customers) create and spread them through a range of social media platforms, a concept considered as fictional, metaphorical narratives. More and more, contemporary advertisers are using the art of storytelling in their advertisements to inform, engage, and inspire both new and repeat customers emphasizes the importance of compelling stories, images, and exoticized fantasies in destination marketing. The journey of a tourist can be broadly classified into three main phases: (a) the virtual journey, the exposure to stories and other brand-related materials in the digital space before the actual experience; (b) the actual, experienced journey; and (c) the reflective, post-travel phase of sharing experiences after a successful trip, which may include peer support.

According to a survey performed by Spita Maria (Spita, 2017) in the island of Crete, social media is a marketing tool that is used by almost all hoteliers regardless their hotel's size, number of employees or number of rooms. Hoteliers used it and are generally satisfied with their usage. This survey also records the social media operator, the time of their engagement, the objectives of their usage and their intention to continue using them as a marketing tool.

2.2.1 Heritage storytelling

Storytelling can be an interactive medium of communication that significantly affects the tourist experience. It goes beyond the simple conveyance of facts, engaging tourists emotionally and cognitively, thus transforming their levels of involvement and satisfaction (Go & Govers, 2012). Well-crafted narratives evoke a range of emotions, creating emotional bonds and fostering lasting relationships (Palombini, 2017). Moreover, storytelling enriches intellectual engagement by providing context and meaning to historical events, aiding in the preservation of knowledge (Hannam & Ryan, 2019), which, when combined with emotional engagement, enhances overall satisfaction levels. Consequently, storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping a significant and unforgettable journey for tourists.

Existing research has recognized the potential of storytelling in the tourism industry, Postgraduate Dissertation

acknowledging its positive impact on tourist engagement and satisfaction. However, the existing literature does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how storytelling contributes to the creation of the tourist experience. While some studies have explored specific aspects of storytelling, such as emotional engagement or cognitive processing, the broader process through which storytelling creates positive interactions between tourists, guides, and historical sites remains under-examined. There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the complex mechanisms through which storytelling influences the co-creation of tourist experiences in various tourism settings. In current tourism research, there is a research gap in understanding how storytelling, as a vital element of the tourist experience, relates to service-dominant logic (SDL). This study aims to bridge this gap by delving into the fascinating world of storytelling within the context of tourism. The central research question of this study focuses on how storytelling, deeply rooted in service-dominant logic, acts as a catalyst for positive interactions between tourists and guides, particularly in historical sites. Service-dominant logic which emphasizes co-creation and value creation in service experiences (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding this phenomenon. The indivisible nature of service quality, where storytelling plays a decisive role, aligns with the principles of SDL, emphasizing reciprocity in value creation among all parties involved (Doyle & Kelliher, 2023). Exploring the intersection of storytelling and SDL to bridge this gap, this research not only enhances our understanding of tourism dynamics but also offers valuable insights to tour organizers and destination managers on how to optimize the tourist experience within a modern service philosophy. Through the identification and analysis of these co-created values, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of storytelling on the overall texture of tourism experiences, offering invaluable insights for both academics and industry professionals.

2.2.2 Storytelling for sustainable tourism

In such a diverse and dynamically changing market as tourism, and in an international environment influenced by global phenomena such as wars and lockdowns, conscious decisions related to tourism are gradually developing and are associated with three key concepts: social impact, sustainability, and storytelling (Haugen, 2020).

Greece, as one of the oldest and recognized tourist markets in the world, has interest to shape its tourism product around these concepts with a critical eye, and those working in tourism

must build and promote an economically sustainable industry, emphasizing on people and the planet. There are several examples in Greece, as we will present below, that bring these issues to the forefront of the discussion.

Although the social impact has a positive tone, the tourism industry should consider its overall impact on people and places it intersects with. Some of these impacts are visible and obvious, such as overtourism in Santorini or other cosmopolitan areas of Greece. Others are largely unknown and unrecognized by travelers (Wood, Milstein, Ahamed-Broadhurst, 2019). These are called "invisible burdens" and include issues such as water scarcity in several Greek islands and waste management in areas that receive disproportionately large number of tourists comparing to their size and infrastructure. It is imperative that tourism professionals take into account the ripple effects of their services at all levels of the supply chain and the tourism ecosystem. They must take responsibility for their impact and implement plans that mitigate negative consequences and enhance local benefits.

At the core of all this lies the key to social impact — the local community. A recent paper focusing on local solutions for climate resilience emphasizes the importance of local people in achieving impacts. When empowered to drive meaningful change, local communities approach problems with a holistic perspective, produce fairer outcomes, and achieve higher social, economic, and environmental returns. The idea of sustainable tourism is often mistakenly considered a "type" of tourism, but it actually involves the application of sustainable practices within the travel context. "Sustainability" means that something can be maintained at a certain level or rate. Applied to tourism, this means that the impact of transportation, accommodation, interactions, and other travel-related activities does not negatively affect the environment, society, or economy. Tourism should not cause harm and, ideally, should have a positive impact on people, the planet, and profits.

Tourism is a multifaceted and complex industry. Pre-pandemic, it employed approximately 10 percent of the global workforce according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, but it has deep impacts on ancillary industries (WTTC, 2024). It touches urban and rural spaces from the depths of the sea to the highest mountains across all seven continents. It encounters every imaginable group of people. And it is not concentrated in a single place: The very act of travel extends to a wide variety of destinations as people move from one place to another.

Tourism should not cause harm and, ideally, it should have a positive impact on people, the planet, and profits. The concept we should keep at the forefront of all travels is this: Do no harm. Even better: Do good as guided by the locals.

To make the truth of the destination and its needs, as reflected by social impact and sustainability, more easily perceptible, storytelling by locals is the most direct way. At the same time, travelers are increasingly interested in having more "authentic" experiences and seek opportunities to learn about and from the destinations and the people who live there.

Instead of hiding behind a sanitized narrative, the tourism industry must embrace the diversity and complexity of a space that reflects the very nature of life. Sometimes it is uncomfortable and difficult to embrace this mixed mindset, especially if you represent a destination. But, again, if tourism is truly a "force for good," then those who work in the field must be willing to engage and find ways to tell important stories. Just as they celebrate those undeniable historical and cultural touchstones like food and art, they must be willing to engage in discussions about issues like racism and oppression. Every company, every destination, every individual working in this field just needs to consider three simple things to chart a better course forward: their social impact, their story, and their commitment to sustainability.

2.2.3 Greece storytelling campaigns

Storytelling for tourist destinations is now one of the main tools for enhancing reputation and boosting the competitiveness of a destination's brand, especially in the digital age. Through digital media, people can be encouraged to share their travel stories and experiences. The way local governments and cultural organizations understand and promote storytelling about places ("place storytelling") can have a significant impact on the success of an area competing for tourism and development expenditures. A notable example is Greece, which launched in 2022 a tourism campaign based on the true story of an Austrian man named Otto, who visited Greece many years ago but decided to stay in the country permanently. The 2022 campaign by the Greek National Tourism Organization (GNTO) focuses on the emotions one experiences when visiting Greece and, through storytelling, conveys the message that sometimes, just one stop in Greece is enough to realize that one has found a new home.

Greece, having historically shaped a wide variety of sounds and connections with the prospective tourist, focuses its tourism campaign on emotion. As the ex-minister of Tourism Vasilis Kikilias, who launched this campaign, states, "We chose to focus on the emotions that a visit to our country evokes. A true story inspires the new campaign promoting Greece abroad, through the narration of a traveler's experience who initially came to our country for

vacation, but the tranquility, simplicity, and beauty he experienced led him to stay, work, create a family in Greece, and ultimately change his life forever."

Meanwhile, the private institutions such as the Greek Tourism Businesses Association (SETE) support and finance several campaigns aiming to strengthen Greek tourism and enhance the image and reputation of Greece internationally through the repositioning and promotion of all aspects of its tourism product. In a more local scale, comparing to the campaign presenting the Austrian man named Otto, Marketing Greece launched 5 new, fresh and vibrant videos called "How To Athens" which reveal, through the eyes of the residents of Athens, the palette of colors, experiences and emotions of the capital. With a casual mood and moments of carefreeness, the "How To Athens" videos invite the traveling public to experience Athens the way its residents do.

On these videos the viewer discovers walks and routes, against the backdrop of the modern character and rich cultural heritage of the city, lesser-known streets and neighborhoods of Athens with urban style, all those places that are hot spots for the city's residents and describe their habits in a unique way.

According to Ioanna Dretta, CEO of Marketing Greece, "The need to show visitors the everyday side of Athens and to share with them this special and peculiar charm of the city was the reason why we created this new content. It is a series of videos with young faces, modern snapshots and strong elements of localhood. The multidimensional personality of Athens proves to be inexhaustible, and we continue to utilize them to constantly strengthen the City Break product of the capital."

Another idea developed between SETE, was to make Athens' tourism professionals ambassadors of the city by letting them share their insider's tips about what is truly great about this famed destination with the visitors of the city, who would then vote, share, and promote the best tips and experiences. An interactive digital platform and campaign was launched for the promotion of "authentic" Athens through audiovisual content, tips, and insights provided by local tourism professionals and engage the travelers, the visitors to promote and share their favorites. 10 thematic categories were created (Hospitality, Gastronomy, Flea Markets & Local Products, Services, Walks & Tours, Nightlife, Music & Events, Culture & Arts, Smart Shopping, Contemporary Culture & Urban Art, Sea, Activity & Adventure) that make up the authentic Athenian experience, telling the story of the city in a captivating, interesting way.

3. Research methodology

Research methodology is useful to establish the structure of our research, such as the strategy, the approach, the research philosophy, and the components of the methodology (Saunders et al. 2009). Each research method has its own limitations according to McGrath's "three-horn dilemma" (McGrath, 1981). The three main research goals of generalizability, precision, and realism conflict with each other, so finally the research process is a sequence of interlocking choices, in which simultaneously particular conflicting prerequisites are needed to be maximized.

3.1 Case study purpose

In today's rapidly evolving travel landscape, the modern traveler is more connected, tech-savvy, and experience-focused than ever before. The rise of digital tools has reshaped the way people explore the world, with travelers seeking not only destinations but also significant, iconic experiences that resonate on a personal level. In this research, we attempt to decipher how storytelling functions as a marketing tool in the tourism industry and to what extent it influences travelers' choices in such a dynamic and evolving environment of over-promotion of tourism products.

Through the targeted questionnaire, we will examine the traveler's sensitivity to the stimuli of storytelling in its various forms. In this way, we will try to better understand the trends of today's tourism market in Greece, the habits of consumers, and to statistically predict their choices in an inherently subjective dilemma.

Today, the ability to travel has become more affordable and accessible. The common goal for modern travelers is usually to experience travel in the best way possible, explore new places, and bring back memories and knowledge.

To effectively engage today's travelers, tourism professionals can focus on three key strategies:

- highlighting hidden gems and local stories that offer unique and authentic insights,
- embracing experiences that allow travelers to actively participate in their journeys,
- taking advantage of social media and technology to create personalized and shared moments.

As presented earlier in our bibliography research, digital channels became a vital tool for

engaging modern travelers. Narratives allow local tourism offices, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), economic development organizations and travel agents to offer travelers interactive and unforgettable experiences that enhance their connection to the places they visit. Especially important in cultural tourism, storytelling, which can also be digital, brings history to life, making exploration more accessible and engaging. The creation of stories in unique digital formats allows for affordable, accessible, and unforgettable tourism experiences—exactly what today's travelers are looking for.

Another strategy for engaging travelers is to highlight hidden gems and local stories that offer unique and authentic insights into a destination. Modern tourists are increasingly drawn to lesser-known places where they can discover the true essence of a location beyond the usual tourist attractions.

The true essence of travel lies in the connection formed between the visitor and the destination. Storytelling humanizes the places we visit, presenting the stories of those who call them home. Whether through a self-guided city app or a guided neighborhood experience, local stories bridge the gap between history and heritage and the global traveler, creating a sense of belonging that connects the traveler to the destination.

By focusing on these lesser-known stories, tourism professionals can offer travelers a more intimate and personalized experience. This approach not only supports local communities by spreading the economic benefits of tourism but also enriches the traveler's experience by connecting them with the culture, history, and people of the destination.

In today's digital age, social media and technology play a crucial role in creating personalized and shared travel experiences. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram are crucial in helping modern travelers discover new destinations and share their adventures in real-time. By leveraging these platforms, tourism professionals can interact with travelers more effectively, offering personalized recommendations and interactive content.

The objective of this study is to investigate the current state, research hotspots, and emerging trends in storytelling within the tourism field, with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of existing research, identifying key areas of focus, and highlighting potential directions for future studies. Furthermore, our study focusses on Greek market and aims to collect the traveler's perception on storytelling on their travelling choices.

3.2 Research strategy and method

The research strategy is the general canvas which illustrates how the researcher is addressing the research questions. Various strategies, including surveys, experiments, case studies, and more, can be used (Saunders et al., 2009). In our study, we developed a case study on Greek tourism market regarding the storytelling effect. We performed primary research via questionnaire in order to exploit the collected data on a specific business data analysis. The goal of the research is being carried out by conducting quantitative surveys and integrating the results with hypotheses derived from earlier studies. The current research constitutes a survey and its research method and approach has been quantitative with the use of questionnaires. Similar methodology approach has been applied in several related studies in the greek and international literature (Panousi, 2020), (Papanikolopoulou, 2019), (Frousiou, 2019), (Bordet-Volay, 2015), (Choi, 2016), (Pan & Chen, 2019).

3.3 Survey structure

Conducting research constitutes a particular form of goal-oriented acting ‘through the researcher’s own eyes’ (Jonker & Pennink, 2010). Research is divided into scientific and applied research. Scientific or fundamental research concerns conducting studies that adds to general knowledge, theories, concepts, or models (Jonker & Pennink, 2010, p.9). Applied or management research is the research that generates insights, concepts, methods, etc. which are applicable for a specific managerial problem. Applying certain scientific methodologies to practical situations is in itself a part of science, too (Jonker & Pennink, 2010, p.10). Case studies constitute in-depth investigations of a group or single person, and are widely employed in social sciences and especially in management science. They provide valuable and rich qualitative data with high levels of validity (McLeod, 2019).

As a starting point our research comprises a bibliometric analysis of communication, marketing and storytelling in the tourism field. The research is carried out via a questionnaire featuring a series of questions used to collect useful information from respondents about their perception on storytelling on their travelling choices. The questionnaire is written and comprise an interview-style format. Some questions are qualitative and the majority is quantitative. It is conducted online and on paper. The questionnaire features mainly closed questions helping out with an easy analysis of the results.

3.4 Data Collection and Methodology Tools

Data collection can be obtained both from primary or secondary sources. A primary data source is being used when researchers collect their own data for analysis, and a secondary source is being used when the data for the researcher's analysis have been collected by someone else. In our study, few secondary data were available for the specific topic regarding the greek tourism market, so primary data were collected via a questionnaire. This is the most common and straightforward tool on quantitative surveys gathering primary data via a questionnaire with given answer alternatives within an area that has already been determined. A survey scale includes a set of answer options constituting a part of closed-ended questions. The survey scale of the current study has included Likert-scale ten-range options to evaluate the level of the respondents answers. In the current study the data collected have been categorized and depicted in charts. In-depth interviews were not utilized because our purpose was to illustrate the different levels of storytelling influence and not to point out some exceptional cases of extreme storytelling influence.

The main tool utilized in the study is inferential statistics. The collected data were tested regarding their reliability and provided "inferring" characteristics from a small group (our sample of 200 persons) onto a much larger groups (the population of tourists travelling around Greece). Inferential statistics was the most adapted tool in our study. There was no possibility for direct comparative analysis since there is no set of comparable data available in the Greek tourism market. A critical review of the literature was performed, but the main purpose of the study was to enrich the knowledge with primary data. No complex mathematical models were developed (such as Monte Carlo simulations or mathematical programming) since our intention was to understand the way that storytelling message is perceived by tourists and not predict it.

A set of analytical software tools can be used to assist the data analysis such as MS Excel, MS Access, SPSS, etc. In the current study, the data have been collected and analyzed on MS Excel software.

These primary data findings need to be objectively interpreted and critically analyzed through comparison with other findings of the same research framework (Saunders et al., 2012). In our survey, the results are commented at a first level presenting information collected exclusively from the questionnaire answers. The questionnaire questions progress logically from the least sensitive to the most sensitive, from the factual and behavioral to the cognitive, and from the more general to the more specific. This structure allows the

responder to answer naturally minimizing question order effects and avoiding judgmental dependencies between answers. The results are commented at a second level to other researchers' results. This comparison offers an initial validation of our results and allows a qualitative analysis between the identified differences.

The questionnaire was available online for completion from December 2024 until March 2025, at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSequ3fMMPofgavld2bn4iXcRyfoYaPXMqU ni9VKIBkRRhQ3SA/viewform>

3.5 Survey variables

The independent variables are the variables the researcher “controls” with the assumption that they have a direct effect on the dependent variable (McLeod, 2019). The independent variables in the current study included the traveler's willingness to pay more for a product integrating a positive story. In addition, the independent variables are related to the level of influence in different storytelling sources (travel guides stories, local people stories, friends stories, influencers stories).

3.6 Pre-testing

The current questionnaire was not based on an identical questionnaire of the literature, so the pre-testing was even more useful process to consolidate it. The questionnaire pre-test aims to ensure that phrasing and expressions, flow of questions, instructions, and scale have been proper (Churchill et al., 2010). Hence, the pre-testing verifies that the questionnaire communicates the information clearly, accurately and correctly to the respondents. In the current study, the pre-testing was undertaken by a draft questionnaire answered by 20 respondents. Required adjustments and improvements occurred after analyzing these 20 answers before validating the questions and closed-type answers of the final questionnaire.

3.7 Sampling

All surveys are concerned with defining the ‘research population’ which will provide all the data needed for the research question. Since it is impossible or impractical to involve all members of this population (N), a key strategy demands random (probability) sampling. The aim is to ensure that the participants constitute a representative subset of the research

population and hence, the findings can be generalized to the research population with confidence and accuracy (Gill, & Johnson, 2002). The target population refers to the collection of objects which can provide the information required by the researcher and about which inferences will be made (Bajpai, 2011). For the current study, the questionnaire was distributed online in a pool of greek and foreign tourists who travelled to Kythira island in 2024. Collecting data from this sample is a practical, cost-effective and manageable way to collect relevant answers. On the other hand, the selected sample does not necessarily represent the entire population of greek and foreign tourists travelling around Greece.

According to Malhotra (2007), the sample size affects the results' accuracy. It also directly affects the appropriateness of the statistical tools chosen (Hair et al.2010). For the current study, efforts had been put to include maximize the size of the sample in the time limits of the study. 200 respondents participated and answered the survey with a high ratio of acceptance to answer (almost 90%).

It can be easily understood that tourists with different habits visit different parts of Greece. So it is really challenging trying to realize a survey on the topic.

3.8 Questionnaire Design and Development

A questionnaire is a research tool consisting of sets of questions for the purpose of collecting data from respondents. Data can be obtained relatively quickly and they can serve data collection when the interviews would be difficult and impractical. However, a potential problem with questionnaires is that respondents may bend the truth or lie due to the fact that most people want to show a positive aspect of themselves (McLeod, 2018). Overall, questionnaires can be effective instruments of estimating the behavior, preferences, attitudes, intentions, and opinions of sizable sample of subjects.

In the current study, the questionnaire is built with multiple choice closed and rating-scale questions, evaluated on a 10-point Likert-type scale. Our intention is for the questionnaire to remain concise and targeted, and to request quick responses from the travelers being surveyed.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, there are demographic questions to collect information regarding the age, gender, and marital status of the respondent. This data will allow us to extract statistics based on these characteristics of the travelers. In these questions, the nationality of the respondent is not collected as the sample of people surveyed is predominantly greek.

Question 1:

I am
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a man
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a woman

Question 2:

I am
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • under 18 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18-30 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30-40 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40-55 years old
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 55 years old

Question 3:

I am
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In couple with another person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A family with kids

After collecting the demographic data, we attempt to outline the travel profile of the respondent in relation to the initial destination search they might conduct, as well as how early they choose to book their vacations. These data will be useful to confirm corresponding statistics from the literature that highlight the ever-increasing percentage of information searches conducted online.

Question 4:

I usually go on vacations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In couple
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With my family and my kids
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With friends or with a group

Question 5:

I choose and reserve my trip
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last minute
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 days earlier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 month earlier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 months earlier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 months earlier
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 3 months earlier

Question 6:

I choose my destination based on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My research on the internet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information from my friends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general reputation of the destination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other

Question 7:

I search about my destination on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on paper version of travel journals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the internet on touristic sites
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on social media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on travel agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other

Question 8:

I search information about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stay
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entertainment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities

• restaurants
• historical information
• attraction sightseeing
• social information
• other

In the next series of questions, we attempt to identify which promotional elements of the tourist destination influence the prospective traveler. We also try to score the traveler's level of influence from the stories about the place they may have from travel guides, local residents, acquaintances who have traveled to that place, or social media influencers.

Question 9:

I make my choice based in :			
Photos	Yes	No	50-50
Videos	Yes	No	50-50
Stories	Yes	No	50-50
Reviews	Yes	No	50-50

Question 10:

I consider that stories that I read about a destination on the internet are important.	
• Yes	
• No	
• 50-50	

Question 11:

I am influenced by travel guides stories									
1 (little)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (much)

Question 12:

I am influenced by local people stories									
1 (little)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (much)

Question 13:

I am influenced by my friends stories who have already visited the destination									
1 (little)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (much)

Question 14:

I am influenced by influencers stories who have already visited the destination									
1 (little)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (much)

In the last part of the questionnaire, we try through our questions to find out how the traveler evaluates and arrives at their final travel choice between cost and the positive impression created by storytelling.

Question 15:

When I've heard a positive story about a destination, I'm willing to pay more										
No	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%	50%

Question 16:

In the final choice of my destination, it mainly affects me	
•	The total cost
•	Reviews
•	Stories
•	The general reputation of the destination
•	Other

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Questionnaire findings and interpretation

The results of the survey according to the primary data obtained through the questionnaire are presented below. First, the demographic characteristics are presented, referring to the sample of the 200 respondents. The respondents were requested to determine their gender, the age group they belonged in and their family status.

The participants in the questionnaire are divided between women and men at a rate of 62% and 38% respectively. The sample is sufficiently representative in the 4 age categories that were preselected, while there are no responses from minors. Out of the 200 respondents, the larger part of the respondents falls into the age group 30 – 40, with a percentage of 37,5%, followed by the age group 18 – 30 with a percentage of 27,5%, and then 22,5% were individuals at the age group of 40 – 55. Finally, a smaller percentage of 12,5% were individuals over 55 years old, and none of the respondents was minor.

Είμαι
200 απαντήσεις

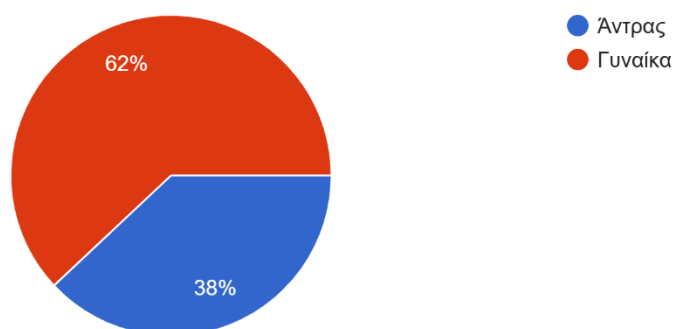


Figure 7 Question 1 results

Είμαι

200 απαντήσεις

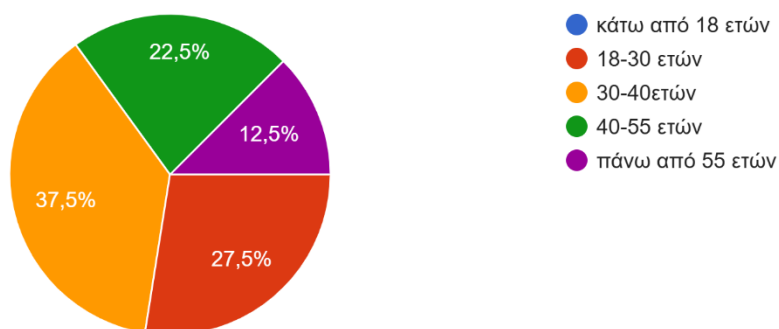


Figure 8 Question 2 results

The majority of respondents are a couple with another person (52%), while the rest of the respondents were single people (29,5%) and families with children (18,5%).

Είμαι

200 απαντήσεις

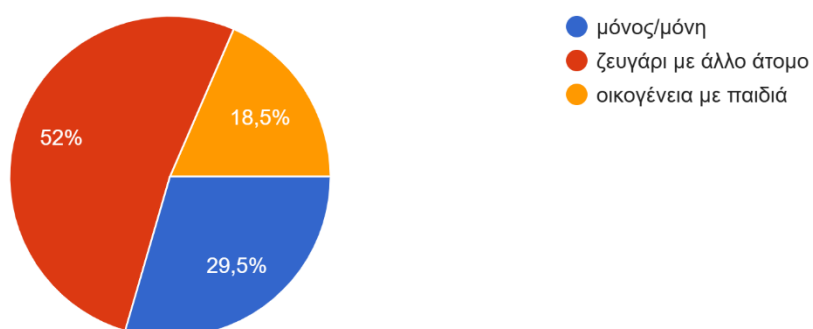


Figure 9 Question 3 results

		N	%
Gender	Male	76	38
	Female	124	62
Age group	Under 18y	0	0
	18-30y	55	27,5
	30-40y	75	37,5
	40-55y	45	22,5
	Over 55y	25	23,5
Family status	Alone	59	29,5
	In couple with another person	104	52
	Family with kids	37	18,5

Table 1 Survey demographic characteristics

As far as their travelling habits are concerned, 56,5% travel as a couple, 23% travel with friends or a group, 14,5% travel with their family and their kids. Lastly, a small 6,5% declared travelling alone. Comparing these results with question 3 answers about the travelers' family status we can notice that from a strong 29,5% of people who leave alone only 6,5% travel alone. The largest part of solo living persons prefers travelling with company.

Συνήθως πηγαίνω διακοπές
200 απαντήσεις

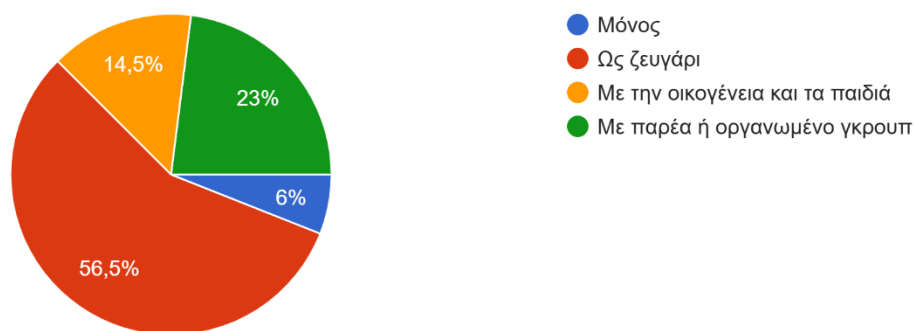


Figure 10 Question 4 results

Regarding the time when travelers choose and book their trips, we notice that the majority 32,5% do it 1-2 months in advance, while one in four (25,5%) does it 2-3 months in advance and another one in four (26%) does it during the last month before vacations. A smaller percentage of 8,5% of the respondents book their trips at least 3 months earlier. Lastly, very few people declared being last-minute travelers since only 2,5% and 5% of the travelers declared booking last minute or 15 days prior of their trip.

Επιλέγω και κλείνω το ταξίδι μου
200 απαντήσεις

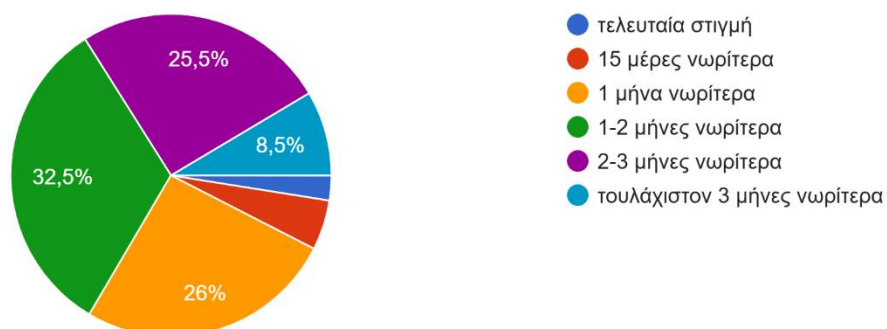


Figure 11 Question 5 results

A more detailed declination of Question 5 results is performed based on several criteria. Some interesting conclusions are deducted. Elder travelers aged more than 55 years old book their vacations at least 1-2 months in advance in a percentage of 88% (22/25 respondents). Younger travelers aged between 18 and 30 years old book their vacations during the last month before their trip in a percentage of 90% (48/53 respondents). Tourists who travel with families use to reserve at least 2-3 months in advance 75% (21/28 respondents).

Prospective tourists seem to consider mainly information from their friends (71,5%) when choosing their destination. The second and third criteria are information collected from the internet (44,5%) and the general reputation of the destination (41,5%).

Επιλέγω τον προορισμό μου με βάση
200 απαντήσεις

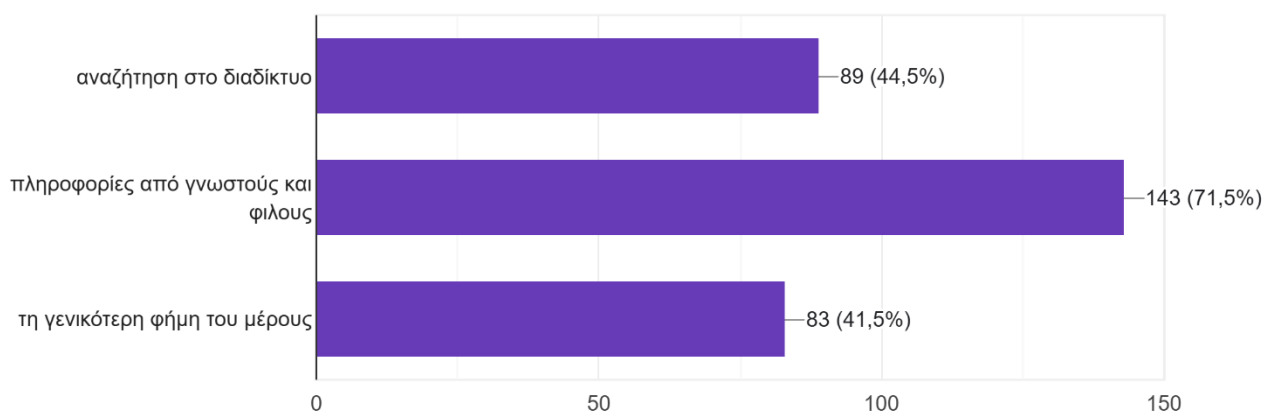


Figure 12 Question 6 results

It is clear from the questionnaire results that the search for information is concentrated on the internet (92%) and social media (44.5%) and much less on the more traditional print publications (38.5%) and travel agencies (14%).

Κάνω αναζήτηση για τον προορισμό που με ενδιαφέρει

200 απαντήσεις

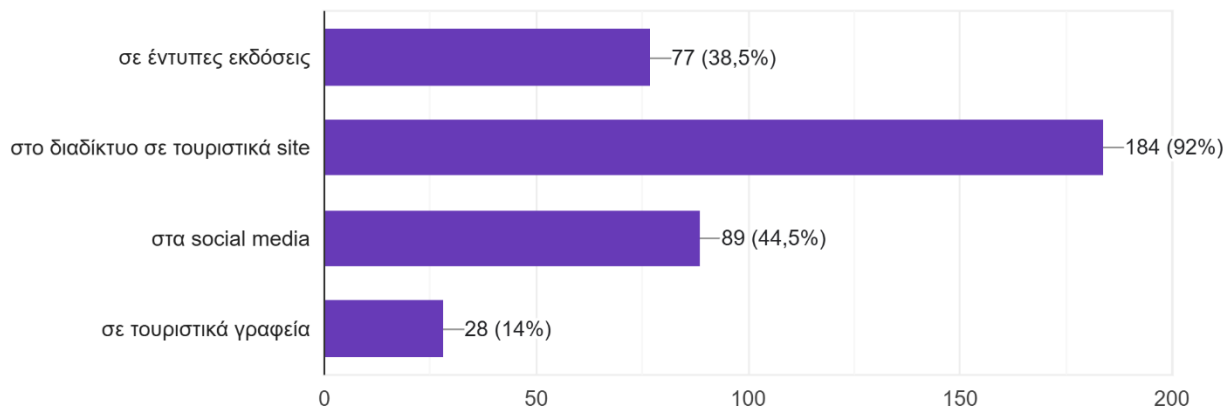


Figure 13 Question 7 results

A more detailed declination of Question 12 results is performed based on age group criteria. Elder travelers aged more than 55 years old research information mainly on the internet 72% (18/25 respondents) and on traditional print publications 88% (22/25 respondents). Younger travelers aged between 18 and 30 years old research information mainly on the internet. 94,5% (52/55 respondents) aged between 18 and 30 years research information from the internet and an 80% (44/55 respondents) on social media.

Tourists' information research seems to focus primarily on accommodation choice (92%) and sightseeing attractions (84,5%). At a second level, travelers are looking information for activities (52%), historical information (39%) and entertainment (27.56%) offered by the destination. Information about the society of the destination attract only 25% of the interest and local food and restauration choices interests even less (11,5%).

Κάνω αναζήτηση πληροφοριών για

200 απαντήσεις

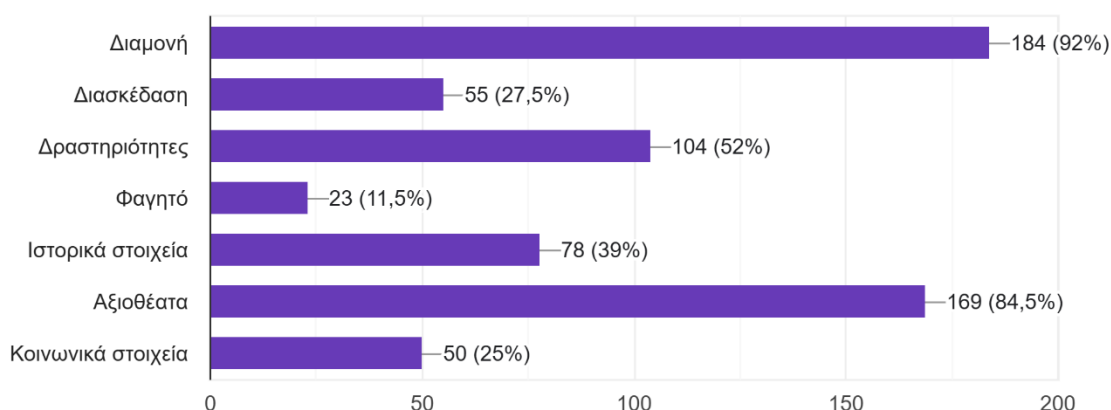


Figure 14 Question 8 results

Travelers' responses show the importance they give to the photos, videos and stories they find about the destination. It seems that travelers make their choice based on photos they find about a destination since 59% (118/200) of the respondents declared so. Travelers also make their choice based on videos of the destination 54% (108/200). Stories have a great importance for travelers since 63% (126/200) respondents make their choice based on them, 30,5% (61/200) are neutral towards stories and only 5% (10/200) stated that they do not take in account stories for their choice. Lastly, seem divided about reviews. 34% (68/200) of the respondents stated that they take in account reviews for their travel choices, 21,5% (43/200) do not take in account reviews and for a larger part of 44% (88/200) reviews has a neutral effect.

Επιλέγω με βάση :

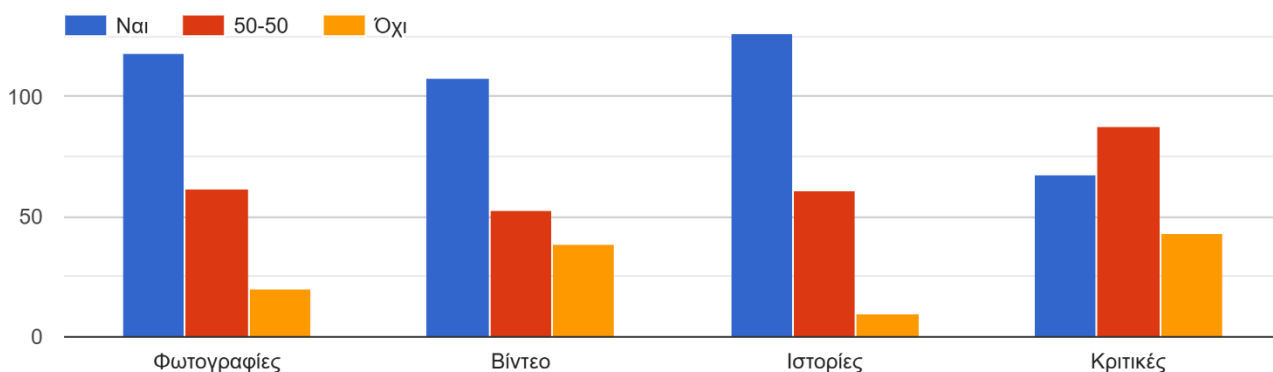


Figure 15 Question 9 results

When asked how important they consider the stories they read online about the respective destination, travelers answered that 71,5% consider them important while the remaining 27,5% have a neutral response to the stories. It is impressive that there are only 1% (2/200) negative answers to this question.

Θεωρώ σημαντικές τις ιστορίες που διαβάζω στο internet για το μέρος
200 απαντήσεις

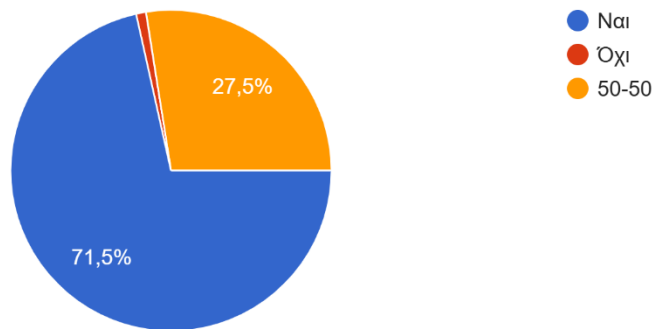


Figure 16 Question 10 results

The following series of questions (questions 11 to 14) is the core part of the survey. The following collected data aims to identify the traveler's level of influence from the stories about the place received from travel guides, local residents, friends who have traveled to that place, or social media influencers. These data will be analyzed statistically in the next part in order to test the reliability of the answers and identify any correlation with question 15 regarding the traveler's willingness to pay more for their trip if they have heard positive stories about the destination, they are considering visiting.

The majority of travelers seem to be influenced at a scale of at least 7/10 by the stories they read in travel guides. The larger part of travelers (30%) is influenced at a scale of 8/10 by travel guides stories and another 28% at a scale of 7/10. It is important to notice that 9,5% are highly influenced by travel guides stories. Question 11 answers have an average value of 7,395, a median value of 8 and a standard deviation equal to 1,55.

Με επηρεάζουν οι ιστορίες των ταξιδιωτικών οδηγών

200 απαντήσεις

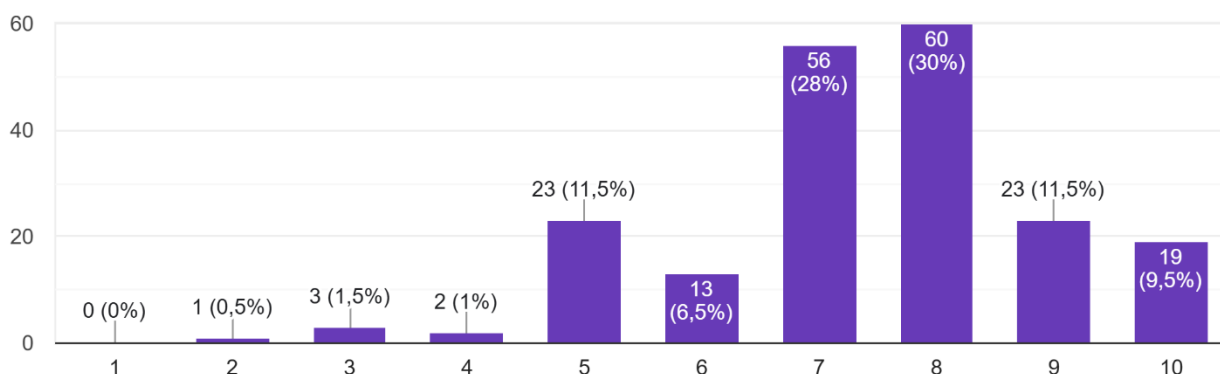


Figure 17 Question 11 results

The impact of local residents' stories seems minor comparing to travel guides stories. The larger part of travelers (37%) takes a neutral stance while there is notable percentage of 18% that seems to be affected at a scale of 7/10. Question 12 answers have an average value of 6,13, a median value of 6 and a standard deviation equal to 1,70.

Με επηρεάζουν οι ιστορίες των ντόπιων κατοίκων

200 απαντήσεις

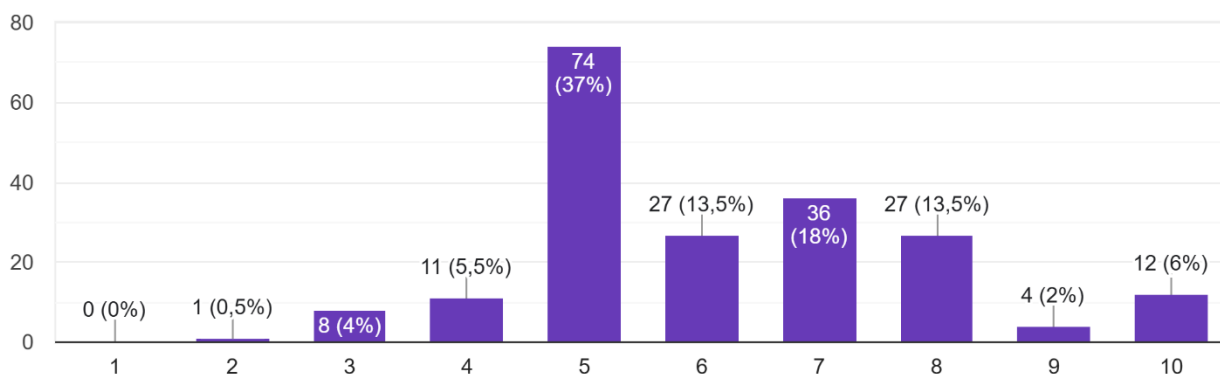


Figure 18 Question 12 results

Friends' stories seem to have a great influence on the choice of destination. Almost 85% of the respondents assessed that more than 7/10 times they are influenced by the experiential stories of their friends. 42,5% of travelers are influenced at a scale of 7/10 by friends' stories and another 27,5% at a scale of 8/10. Question 13 answers have an average value of 7,42, a median value of 7 and a standard deviation equal to 1,11.

Με επηρεάζουν οι ιστορίες φίλων μου που επισκέφτηκαν το μέρος
200 απαντήσεις

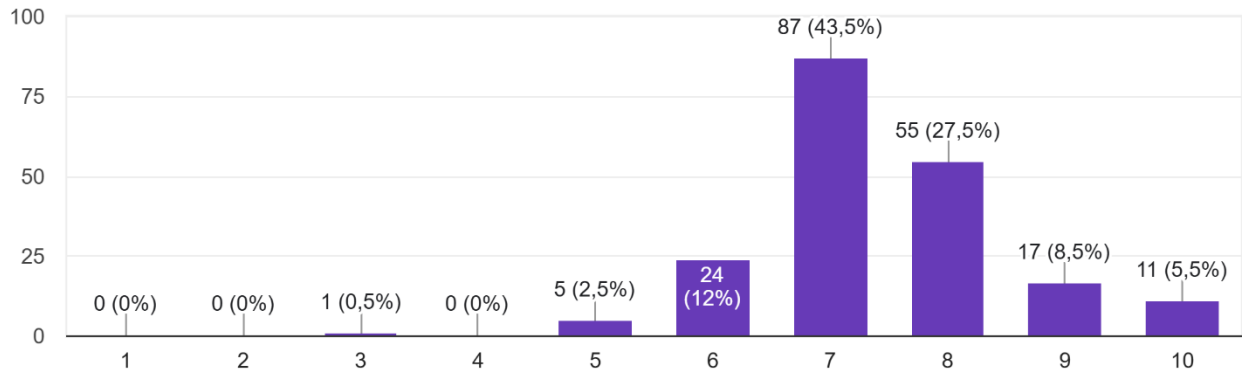


Figure 19 Question 13 results

The effect of stories promoted by influencers has a bigger disparity between travelers. 26,5% of travelers are influenced at a scale of 5/10 by influencers stories, another 24% at a scale of 6/10 and another 19% at a scale of 7/10. Question 14 answers have an average value of 5,055, a median value of 5 and a standard deviation equal to 1,69.

Με επηρεάζουν οι ιστορίες των influencers που επισκέφτηκαν το μέρος
200 απαντήσεις

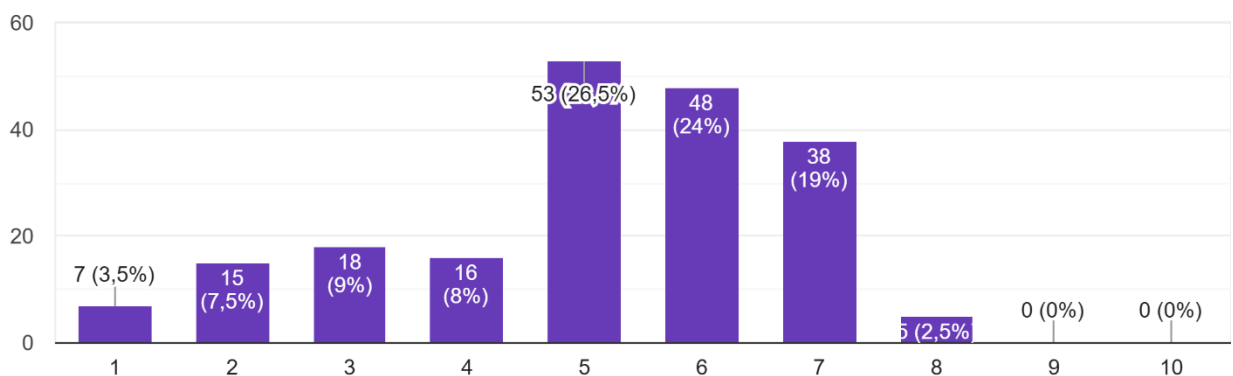
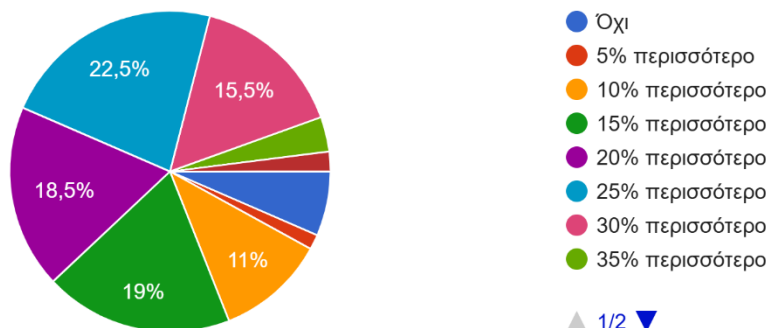


Figure 20 Question 14 results

Travelers seem willing to pay more for their trip if they have heard positive stories about the destination they are considering visiting. The survey revealed that 11% are willing to pay 10% more, 19% are willing to pay 15% more, 18,5% are willing to pay 20% more, 22,5% are willing to pay 25% more and another 15,5% are willing to pay 30% more.

Όταν έχω ακούσει μια θετική ιστορία για ένα μέρος είμαι διατεθειμένος να πληρώσω
περισσότερο
200 απαντήσεις



When I've heard a positive story about a destination, I'm willing to pay more	N	%
No	13	6,5
5% more	3	1,5
10% more	22	11
15% more	38	19
20% more	37	18,5
25% more	45	22,5
30% more	31	15,5
35% more	7	3,5
40% more	4	2
45% more	0	0
50% more	0	0

Figure 21 Question 15 results

Finally, it seems that the cost of the trip is the first and indisputable criterion for choosing the destination as it affects 75,5% of travelers. Stories influence 23% of travelers. The impact of reviews on the final choice of destination is significant as 33% seem to be influenced by it.

Στην τελική επιλογή του προορισμού μου με επηρεάζει κυρίως
200 απαντήσεις

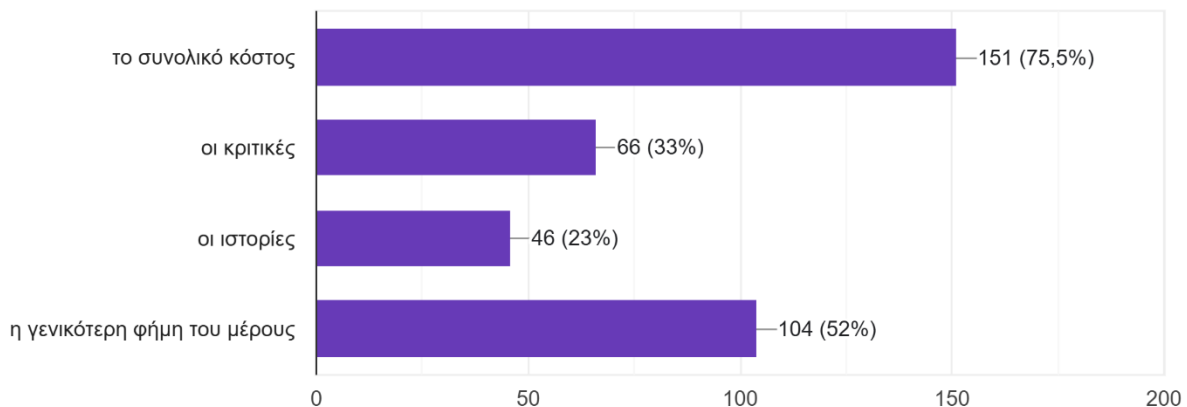


Figure 22 Question 16 results

4.2 Data statistical analysis

In order to test the question 11 to 14 answers for consistency, we will check the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient measures the internal consistency, or reliability, of a set of survey items. In our study we use this statistic to determine whether travelers' answers about the level of influence in different storytelling sources measure the same characteristic and have an adequate level of inter-item reliability. Cronbach's alpha quantifies the level of agreement on a standardized 0 to 1 scale.

High Cronbach's alpha values indicate that response values for each traveler across the set of questions are consistent. For example, when a traveler gives a high response for one of the storytelling sources, they are also likely to provide high responses for another storytelling source. This consistency indicates the measurements are reliable and the survey items might measure the same characteristic.

Conversely, low Cronbach's alpha values indicate the set of survey items do not reliably measure the same construct. High responses for one question do not suggest that travelers rated the other storytelling source highly. Consequently, the questions are unlikely to measure the same property because the measurements are unreliable.

The reliability analysis is presented below. We consider the following 4 survey questions.

Item 1 – I am influenced by travel guides stories (question 11)

Item 2 – I am influenced by local people stories (question 12)

Item 3 – I am influenced by my friends stories who have already visited the destination (question 13)

Item 4 – I am influenced by influencers stories who have already visited the destination (question 14)

These questions all use a scale ranging from 0 (Low) to 10 (High).

The overall Cronbach’s alpha is calculated for the 4 items. The overall Cronbach’s alpha is 0.60. The reliability level is considered questionable by most standards. Then the Cronbach’s alpha is recalculated after omitting each item because that process can provide valuable information about specific items.

Omitted Item	Cronbach's alpha
Item 1 - question 11	0,469
Item 2- question 12	0,429
Item 3- question 13	0,547
Item 4- question 14	0,644

Table 2 Reliability analysis - Cronbach's alpha with omitted items

The Cronbach’s alpha is recalculated after removing one item each time. Removing Item 1 to Item 3 causes Cronbach’s alpha to increase. On the other hand, removing Item 4 causes Cronbach’s alpha to increase from 0.60 to 0.64. This result suggests that removing Item 4 the degree of reliability among the other 3 items is higher. This result means that the 3 first storytelling sources (questions 11 to 13) produce closer scores when they tend to measure the same general construct.

The relationship between the travelers’ willingness to pay more (question 15) and the influence from the 4 storytelling sources (questions 11 to 14) is examined. A multiple regression model is used to predict the value of the dependent variable (question 15) based on the 4 independent variables (questions 11 to 14). In order to do so, question 15 answers are translated from ‘No’ to ‘50% more’ to a 10-points Linkert scale from 0 to 10.

The examined multiple regression model equation with 4 predictors is the following:

$$(\text{Traveler's_willingness_to_pay_more}) = \varepsilon + \beta_1 * (\text{travel_guides_stories}) + \beta_2 * (\text{local people stories}) + \beta_3 * (\text{friends stories}) + \beta_4 * (\text{influencers_stories})$$

The null and alternative hypothesis are :

- Null hypothesis H_0 : $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = 0$
- Alternative hypothesis: H_a : at least one $\beta_i \neq 0$

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0,399368
R Square	0,159495
Adjusted R Square	0,142254
Standard Error	1,682806
Observations	200

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	4	104,7872	26,19681	9,250824	7,27E-07
Residual	195	552,2078	2,831835		
Total	199	656,995			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95,0%</i>	<i>Upper 95,0%</i>
Intercept	0,441466	0,90385	0,488428	0,625796	-1,34111	2,224043	-1,34111	2,224043
Travel_guides stories	0,270904	0,095883	2,825373	0,005214	0,081804	0,460004	0,081804	0,460004
Local people stories	-0,11224	0,08906	-1,26032	0,209061	-0,28789	0,0634	-0,28789	0,0634
Friends stories	0,066358	0,116914	0,56758	0,570973	-0,16422	0,296936	-0,16422	0,296936
Influencers stories	0,347354	0,074769	4,645718	6,22E-06	0,199895	0,494812	0,199895	0,494812

Table 3 Regression analysis with 4 independent variables

The regression model R^2 is the percentage of variation in the response that is explained by the model. Considering the 4 independent variables $R^2=0,159$, meaning that only 15,9% of the variance in travelers' willingness to pay more is predicted by the 4 storytelling sources. At the same time, we notice that the p-value is low (<0.05) only for 2 independent variables which suggests that the coefficient is statistically significant.

A second multiple regression model is used to predict the value of the dependent variable (travelers’ willingness to pay more) based on the 2 independent variables that are considered significant (travel guides stories and influencers stories).

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0,389935
R Square	0,152049
Adjusted R Square	0,143441
Standard Error	1,681641
Observations	200

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	2	99,89555	49,94778	17,6624	8,8E-08
Residual	197	557,0994	2,827916		
Total	199	656,995			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95,0%</i>	<i>Upper 95,0%</i>
Intercept	0,697352	0,648516	1,075305	0,283554	-0,58157	1,976277	-0,58157	1,976277
Travel_guides stories	0,207679	0,077329	2,685654	0,007856	0,05518	0,360178	0,05518	0,360178
Influencers stories	0,350517	0,070922	4,942261	1,65E-06	0,210652	0,490381	0,210652	0,490381

Table 4 Regression analysis with 2 independent variables

In the second multiple regression model $R^2=0,152$, meaning that 15,2% of the variance in travelers’ willingness to pay more is predicted by travel guides stories and influencers stories. The regression equation of the developed regression model is the following

(Traveler’s_willingness_to_pay_more)=0,697352+0,207679*(travel_guides_stories)+0,350517*(influencers_stories)

Increasing by 1 unit the impact of travel guide stories on travelers results on 0,20 increase on the traveler’s willingness to pay more. The 0,20 unit increase is translated at 1% increase of willingness to pay more according to the a correspondence between categorial and noncategorical data scale of question 15. Meanwhile, increasing by 1 unit the impact of influencers’ stories on travelers results on 0,35 increase on the traveler’s willingness to pay more. The 0,35 unit increase is translated at 1,75% increase of willingness to pay more according to the a correspondence between categorial and noncategorical data scale of question 15.

The proposed model can help tourism professionals evaluate the possibilities to increase travelers willing to spend more influenced by positive storytelling.

5. Discussion of findings

5.1 Comparison with relevant studies

In this chapter we compare our questionnaire findings with relevant surveys results. The influence of storytelling on the perceived value of products has been demonstrated in the literary and anthropological experiment conducted by Rob Walker and Joshua Glenn (Walker, R., Glenn, J., 2012). In the 'Significant Objects' experiment the author wrote a short fictional prose story about an object on eBay, raising its value. The research revealed that integrating a story with a product can elevate its perceived value by 2706%. The researchers explain that this phenomenon is linked to the way stories engage our brains and emotions. Engaging with a narrative stimulates the release of oxytocin, a hormone that fosters trust and connection, thereby enhancing our emotional attachment to a product. Consequently, this emotional bond can lead to an increased willingness among consumers to pay more for the product. These insights emphasize the critical role of storytelling in effective marketing and branding approaches. By developing compelling narratives that resonate with their intended audience, brands can significantly enhance the perceived value of their offerings and cultivate deeper relationships with their customers. Our survey is not measuring the perceived value of a product integrating a story, but indirectly estimates that measuring the traveler's willingness to pay more for a product integrating a positive story.

A very interesting survey was performed for Seoul tourism market (Choi, 2016). This study targeted foreigners who have visited key tour destination in Seoul and aimed to find out effectiveness of tourism storytelling influencing on destination brand value and tourist behavioral intentions. The result of this survey showed that tourism storytelling has positive effects on tourism brand value in understandability, interestingness, educability, uniqueness and sensibility. It also showed that the tourism brand value has effects on tourist behavioral intentions.

According to a Headstream survey (Headstream, 2015) most UK adults believe that storytelling is a crucial component of brand communication. Approximately 79% of customers questioned prioritized tales in marketing messaging, and 75% of them said it was critical for businesses to include storytelling in their marketing strategy. Similarly, our survey showed that 71,5% of tourists consider that stories that they read about a destination on the internet are important.

Additionally, the Headstream study (Headstream, 2015) discovered that stories with "real people" were most interesting. According to 66% of respondents, brand tales should focus

on "ordinary" people rather than famous people or made-up characters. The survey also showed that not all businesses are successful in their storytelling endeavors, despite the fact that storytelling is crucial for brand communication. Companies are generally good at telling tales, according to about 64% of respondents, whereas 36% disagreed. These results imply that although consumers appreciate narrative in brand communication, firms must carefully develop their tales to make sure they connect with their target market. Brands may improve consumer relationships and boost engagement with their content by emphasizing real-life experiences and concentrating on powerful storytelling strategies. In our study, we tried to identify measure the difference between the different story sources. Travel guides stories appeared to be the most impacting source even if it does not include "real people" such as friends or local resident stories. Meanwhile, an interesting comparison is made between "real people" stories from friends and local resident with those from influencers. It is notices that travelers are impacted more from their friend "real people" stories.

According to Headstream survey (Headstream, 2015), 55% of consumers will think about making a future purchase from a firm if they enjoy its story. Furthermore, 44% of respondents indicated they would tell their contacts about the tale, and 45% said they would "like" the company's Facebook page. On the other hand, 15% of those surveyed said they would immediately purchase from the brand.

Additionally, the survey discovered that consumers preferred to find brand stories on the corporate blog. But customers also embraced branded content on social media advertising campaigns and online pages. The importance of storytelling for brands to successfully interact with their audience is emphasized in the research. Customers are more likely to consider and remain loyal to a company if its narrative strikes a chord with them.

Businesses can utilize storytelling to show their audience that they share values, according to study done by 5W Public Relations (5W Public Relations 2020) on the effects of transparency and storytelling on sales results. According to the report, 71% of customers are more likely to make purchases from companies that share their beliefs. It's interesting to note that younger consumers showed a notably strong demand for shared values. According to almost 83% of millennials polled, value alignment was crucial. Furthermore, according to 76% of respondents, they value CEOs who voice their opinions on matters that are important to them. These findings suggest that storytelling can be a powerful tool for building brand loyalty and driving sales, particularly among younger consumers who place a high value on shared values and social responsibility. By crafting stories that demonstrate a company's commitment to its values and by engaging in transparent communication with

its audience, brands can build stronger connections with their customers and drive growth for their business.

A case study supported by Search Engine Watch showed that storytelling boosted conversions by up to 30% when used to answer customer questions. There was a greater focus placed on B2C than B2B marketing in this study. However, this still led 62% of B2B marketers to rate storytelling as an effective marketing tactic.

According to a report released by Nielson, a global leader in audience measurement and data analytics, 92% of people trust recommendations from people they know, 70% of people trust consumer opinions posted online, 58% of people trust Editorial content such as newspaper articles and 58% of people trust branded websites (Nielsen, 2012). In our study, 92% of people search for information on the internet, 44,5% of people search on social media, 38,5% of people on more traditional print publications and a small 14% of people search on travel agencies.

In his book ‘Actual Minds, Possible Worlds’, Jerome Bruner, an American cognitive psychologist (Bruner, 1987) shows us that stories are 22 times more memorable than plain facts. Stories provide clear and vivid concepts to hang facts on that are much more memorable to us and tend to stick around in our heads when facts tend to be forgotten all too quickly.

5.2 Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This chapter first provides some theoretical implications. Using a theoretical perspective, this chapter also derives propositions extending current literature in tourism sector. Second, it outlines managerial implications on how the current research findings can increase tourism managers’ understanding of the storytelling impact and help them in making decisions resulting in long-term competitive advantage.

Theoretical implications address how the findings contribute to existing theories or models, whether they support, refine or challenge these frameworks. Comparing our research findings, with the presented theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters we can confirm Dann theory (Dann, 1977) who outlines that motivation could arise from two forces those internal to the tourist that drive them to travel, and those external to the travel such as storytelling, which attract them to a new travel experience.

Our research findings contribute to the current literature validating the impact of internet

and social media in the Greek tourism sector. International literature state that people interact with others on social media platforms while looking for information that helps them plan their trips (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). The influence of social media in tourism industry has been clearly identified in our research which is stated in Lewis and Chambers article (Lewis and Chambers, 2000).

It was proven in our research that during the storytelling processing stage travelers transforms the information received through various storytelling sources from the external world into internal knowledge of their mental world. This corresponds to Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (Blackwell, 2005) the information processing stage.

Practical implications focus on the real-world applications of the research. These include recommendations for practitioners, professionals or organizations on implementing the findings to improve practices or processes. Our research findings have important practical implications especially for tourism professionals.

One of the main survey results is the fact that tourists seek information through the internet (92%) and social media (44,5%) and have abandoned more traditional means of communication such as printed travel guides (38,5%). This is a very useful hint for tourism professional in order to focus on advertising via these channels.

The type of information searched by travelers is also in important indicator for tourism professionals. Prospective visitors primarily seek information about accommodation (92%) and sightseeing attractions (84,5%). At a second level, travelers are looking information for activities (52%), historical information (39%) and entertainment (27,56%) offered by the destination. This information can be very helpful for tourism professional in order to choose what type of information should be shared and advertised.

The ultimate purpose of this research is to decipher how storytelling functions as a marketing tool in the tourism industry and to what extent it influences travelers' choices in such a dynamic and evolving environment of over-promotion of tourism products. Some very interesting practical implications are deducted after analyzing the survey data.

Confirming the existing literature and corresponding research, it was deducted that storytelling is considered important by 71,5% of tourists, while the remaining 27,5% have a neutral response to the stories. It is easily understood that storytelling plays an important role in tourism business, so professionals and marketers of the sector should focus on that. More detailed statistics were carried out in our research. Our research delves deeper into the impact of various story sources and revealed that travelers are mainly influenced by the

storytelling of friends and acquaintances at a rate of 7,42/10, by the stories of travel guides at a rate of 7,39/10, and less local people stories (6,13/10) and influencers stories (5/10). This information can help tourism professionals better orientate their efforts on storytelling marketing.

At the same time, the survey results may help professional estimate potential income gain via positive storytelling. Travelers seem willing to pay more for their trip if they have heard positive stories about the destination they are considering visiting. The survey revealed that 11% are willing to pay 10% more, 19% are willing to pay 15% more, 18,5% are willing to pay 20% more, 22,5% are willing to pay 25% more and another 15,5% are willing to pay 30% more.

Last but not least, our research calculated that increasing the impact of travel stories by 1/10 at a 10-point Likert scale, the prospective tourist is willing to spend 1% more, while the corresponding impact of a story from an influencer increases the intention to spend by 1.75%. This can be a practical insight for professionals to estimate potential income gain via storytelling in different sources.

5.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to discuss some of the dissertation's limitations, which could also serve as the foundation for future research.

The first challenge in our survey was the sample size and representability. The sample was limited due to the small amount of time available for the completion of this study, so a bigger sample size could have been greatly useful. This way some reliability issues that occurred during the analysis of the data (for instance the low Cronbach's alpha) could be eliminated. The sample source was limited to travelers who visited Kythira island in 2024. This could have influenced results, since the type of tourists visiting Kythira island is not necessarily the same type of tourists visiting around Greece.

Secondly, the questionnaire did not contain a sufficiently large number of questions that could reveal more factors affecting travelers' decision making and storytelling influence. Further research is essential to determine and establish other parameters and type of messages that could be considered crucial and impactful by travelers in their decision making. On the other hand, our intention was to remain concise and targeted, and to request quick responses from the travelers being surveyed. This offered a high response rate and facilitated the filling of the questionnaire as it required only a couple of minutes.

The main suggestion for future research is to examine further the correlation between new social media and influencers industry relative to the tourism industry. The industry is evolving rapidly and travelers’ level of influence may evolve as well. Future research could also focus on examining the attributes of the story regarding specific characteristics of each destination (for instance sustainability issues, history, society).

In a future and longer study, we could investigate further the chronological order in which the prospective tourist receives stimuli and how these subsequently influence their research and choices. Furthermore, in a longer study the answers could be collected multiple times in a certain time frame in order to investigate tourists’ opinions in time and detect any changes.

6. Conclusions

Our research is structured with an approach from the general to the more specific in order to reach the point of analyzing how and to what extent storytelling functions as a marketing tool in the Greek tourism industry. The analysis of the theoretical framework regarding communication and marketing helped in better understanding its application in the field of tourism, especially in Greece. The investigation of the international literature allowed us, on the one hand, to formulate the right questions on the questionnaire. On the other hand, it allowed us to compare our own research results with those of similar or related studies.

One of the first clear conclusions of the research is that prospective tourists in the Greek market choose their destination based on information from friends and acquaintances (71,5%) and based on information from the internet (44,5%). Tourists seek information through the internet (92%) and social media (44,5%) and have abandoned more traditional means of communication such as printed travel guides (38,5%). This conclusion corresponds to the international trend reflected in contemporary international literature. In a future and more detailed study, we could further investigate the chronological order in which the prospective tourist receives stimuli and how these subsequently influence their search and choices.

Prospective visitors primarily seek information about accommodation (92%) and sightseeing attractions (84,5%). At a second level, travelers are looking information for activities (52%), historical information (39%) and entertainment (27,56%) offered by the destination. Information about the society of the destination attract only 25% of the interest and local food and restauration choices interests even less (11,5%). At the same time, they make their choice mainly based on stories, photos and videos of the place and less on the reviews they receive. The importance travelers give to the reviews they read on relevant sites is a topic that would be of great interest for further investigation, especially for professionals in the field.

Confirming the existing literature and corresponding research, it was deducted that storytelling is considered important by 71,5% of tourists, while the remaining 27,5% have a neutral response to the stories. This aligns with similar statistics from other studies that demonstrate the importance potential customers place on stories. Our research delves deeper into the impact of various story sources and revealed that travelers are mainly influenced by the storytelling of friends and acquaintances at a rate of 7,42/10, by the stories of travel guides at a rate of 7,39/10, and less by local people stories (6,13/10) and influencers stories (5/10).

The research attempted to quantify the added value of storytelling. Travelers seem willing to pay more for their trip if they have heard positive stories about the destination, they are considering visiting. The survey revealed that 11% of the travelers are willing to pay 10% more, 19% are willing to pay 15% more, 18,5% are willing to pay 20% more, 22,5% are willing to pay 25% more and another 15,5% are willing to pay 30% more.

At the same time, travelers admit that the primary criterion for choosing their destination is the overall cost of the trip for 75,5% of tourists and the stories they have heard for only 23% of the travelers. A statistical analysis of the results revealed the correlation between the positive stories tourists receive and their intention to pay more for the destination. It was calculated that increasing the impact of travel stories by 1/10 at a 10-point Likert scale, the prospective tourist is willing to spend 1% more, while the corresponding impact of a story from an influencer increases the intention to spend by 1,75%. Similar studies abroad have focused on the buyer's willingness to spend more on various standardized commercial products, such as clothing, but there are no corresponding studies for the tourism product. The tourism product has peculiarities related not only to the prospective tourist but also to the destination, that is, the product itself. Our research focused on Greece, but it is easily understood that the results could be influenced if the research focused on a smaller area with specific characteristics that mainly attracts tourists with corresponding desires and interests. This research had some limitations which could be eliminated in a future research. The sample was limited due to the small amount of time available for the completion of this study, so a bigger sample size would be greatly useful. This way some reliability issues that occurred during the analysis of the data (for instance the low Cronbach's alpha) could be eliminated. Further research is essential to determine and establish other parameters and type of messages that could be considered crucial and impactful by travelers in their decision making. Future research could examine further the correlation between new social media and influencers industry relative to the tourism industry. Future research could also focus on examining the attributes of the story regarding specific characteristics of each destination (for instance sustainability issues, history, society).

Travelling is vital to shape the tourist's stories and plays a significant role in the creation of their identities, As the great traveler and explorer Ibn Battuta said: 'Travelling leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller'. So finally, travelling is a perpetual sequence of creating life experiences and storytelling them to the future travelers.

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